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Master's Thesis of Comparative Literature

Cinema and the Spatialization of Alienation

A Comparative Study of *Taxi Driver* and Jeon Kyu-hwan's
Town Series

영화와 소외의 공간화

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Abstract:

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This research attempts to analyze the similarities and differences in the use of space between Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* and Jeon Kyu-hwan's *Town Series*. More specifically, it is our intent to delve into how each director uses space to reflect the alienation of the main characters. Though the filmmakers come from two different time periods and national backgrounds, the similar use of a same cinematic mechanism provides a useful tool in analyzing the connection between technique and philosophical theme. The analysis of *Taxi Driver* will focus largely on the film's screenwriter, Paul Schrader. This is in part because of the affinity between director and screenwriter and also because alienation is a particularly salient theme in both Schrader's screenplays and directorial features. This research also includes introductions to each of the films' context in both cinematic history and genre.

Taxi Driver takes place exclusively from the perspective of its main character, Travis Bickle. There is no scene in which Travis is not present, and the extensive use of voiceover narration and point-of-view shots makes the viewer privy to the details of Travis's psychological troubles. The mise-en-scene reflects his loneliness as his inner turmoil is manifested in both the space and cinematic techniques, many borrowed from the Nouvelle Vague, of the film. The camera follows Travis intimately in the confined spaces of his tiny apartment and cramped taxi. Though at first glance Travis appears to suffer from loneliness and insomnia, it becomes clear that he faces a far more existential crisis. In addition to being emotionally cut off from others, Travis feels repulsed by the sordid New York environment yet he nonetheless compulsively seeks out. His contradictions are further exacerbated by his sexuality; while maintaining strict, socially conservative values, Travis frequents pornographic theaters and, in a subconscious manner,

surrounds himself with the prostitutes who populate Times Square. These in turn become a sort of 'pornographic space.' In each case Travis feels alienated, his way of thinking is almost always the cause.

All of these come to form a moral binary, the good 'people' and the 'scum.' Travis's life, however, cannot run on this binary, and he attempts to assuage this contradiction by seeking the affections of a presidential campaign worker. He alienates her when he attempts to take her to a pornographic film – hoping that even the pure indulge in the same impure thoughts as he does. When the relationship breaks apart, Travis turns his obsession to a child prostitute, hoping to save her and, in doing so, cleanse her. This leads him to a violent confrontation with her pimp in a thinly veiled suicide attempt.

From both the nature of his alienation and his seemingly well adapted co-workers, as well as Schrader's own interviews and writings, it is clear that the world Travis lives in is one which can be alienation is not inescapable. If he incapable to transcending it (in a manner similar to the protagonists of the films of Schrader's cinematic idol, Robert Bresson), he is nonetheless capable of managing alienation to tolerable levels. Given the deliberate incoherence of the ending, it is unclear whether or not Travis truly achieved any sort of transcendence or reintegration or if his rampage was a mere catharsis, bound to repeat itself. It is also our task to link this conflict to the existential roots of *Taxi Driver*, ranging from Sartre, to Dostoevsky.

The films of Jeon Kyu-hwan are shot in almost the exact opposite fashion. Jeon Kyu-hwan utilizes a hyper-realist cinematic technique, resulting in a film which appears almost as a documentary. The films of the Town Series are stripped of any techniques which could be labeled 'expressionist,' favoring instead long takes (even after the action of the scene has past) and minimalistic acting. The plot, to the extent that there is a single, coherent plot, is basic and mundane and there is no narration or background music. Rather than following a single protagonist, the film is split between a number of characters, and in *Mozart Town* this effect is so pronounced it would not hyperbole to say that there is no main character.

There is nonetheless a commonality between the assortment of characters, which ranges from a stall worker abandoned by her husband, to an ex-

convict, to a North Korean refugee; each of them are marginalized by society, whether economically, ethnically, or otherwise. The realist attitude in Jeon Kyu-hwan's is tempered, however, by his use of the camera – through the placement of the camera, Jeon Kyu-hwan transforms the city to exaggerate the characters' alienation, whether by presenting a looming, seemingly endless cityscape or focusing in on the confined, suffocating locations his characters inhabit.

Sexuality also plays a major role in describing the characters' inability to connect, either to each other to society as a whole, and its often impulsive nature further underscores the lack of agency. Moreover, in the same way that the Town Series' characters are alienated by the city, they are also alienated by the camera. These factors combine to suggest a sense of hopelessness and inevitability. In direct contrast to *Taxi Driver*, the characters' alienation is not a matter of their own creation - that is to say of their subjectivity - but rather as a product of the social system. They are subsequently unable to do anything to ameliorate their situation, a dilemma which frequently leads tragically to violence.

Keywords: Paul Schrader, Jeon Kyu-hwan, Alienation, Space, Existentialism

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Chapter 1. Introduction

American screenwriter and director Paul Schrader and Korean director Jeon Kyu-hwan have simultaneously a great deal in common despite being polar opposites in other regards. Paul Schrader graduated from the film school at UCLA and worked extensively as a film critic and theorist, his most influential essays being his analysis of film noir and what he refers to as the 'transcendental style' in film. He has worked inside the studio system yet has also shot a number of independent films. Jeon Kyu-hwan, on the other hand, received no formal education in film and did not even begin making films until in his 40's.

In addition to the backgrounds of each filmmaker, there are also a number of stark contrasts between their films, especially between Schrader's "Man in a Room" films (alternately referred to as his "Night Worker" films), and Jeon Kyu-hwan's "Town Trilogy." The first contrast between the two series is readily apparent; the "Man in a Room" films are comprised of *Taxi Driver* (dir. Martin Scorsese, 1976), *American Gigolo* (1980), *Light Sleeper* (1992) and *The Walker* (2007) while Jeon Kyu-hwan's trilogy is formed by *Mozart Town* (2008), *Animal Town* (2009), and *Dance Town* (2010). While Jeon Kyu-hwan's films were produced only a year apart, there are years and even decades between those of Schrader. Before the release of *The Walker*, the first three of Schrader's "Man in a Room" films are referred to as a 'triptych,' a series of paintings that are different from one other yet address the same theme. The same terminology has been applied to Jeon Kyu-hwan's Towns Series. In painting they are literally connected, though in the case of Schrader and Jeon Kyu-hwan films the term connotes a series of films which deal with different aspects of a same theme through separate plotlines. This phenomenon is particularly salient in Jeon Kyu-hwan's films as not only is there a unity of theme and temporal proximity between the three films, but the town series share a number of actors who figure into all three of the films. Although they are not reprising their roles literally in each film, there is a deliberate referential quality to the casting. For our purposes, while it is necessary to address the other films in the series, it is most useful to focus on Schrader's *Taxi Driver*, given the large amount of scholarship on the film and the

particular prominence of the theme in question. In the case of Jeon Kyu-hwan, there is a thematic and stylistic development between *Mozart Town* and the other two films as well as an unfortunate dearth of scholarship on his film; subsequently it is necessary to analyze all three films, although emphasis will be placed on *Mozart Town* and *Animal Town*.

1.1 Thematic Introduction

In both the films of Paul Schrader and Jeon Kyu-hwan, the alienation of the characters takes a central place in the works of both filmmakers, both thematically and structurally. However, there are number of nuances to each director's portrayal of alienation which are reflected both in the narrative structure of the films and the cinematic techniques employed. Various philosophers have addressed the issue of alienation, especially from Hegel¹, and as a result there are a plethora of (often incompatible) definitions, stemming particularly from Marxist and Existentialist traditions. As Shin Oh-hyun pertinently describes, it is best to divide alienation into two categories: 'Existential Alienation' (인간 존재론적 소외론) beginning with Hegel and branching forward to Heidegger and Sartre, and the 'Social Phenomenological Alienation' (사회 현상론적 소외론) of the Marxist tradition.² This division is necessary in understanding the contrasts between *Taxi Driver* and the Town Series. *Taxi Driver* adheres to a more existentialist definition of alienation which manifests itself in a highly subjective camera which contains a number of POV shots and no scene in which Travis is not present (though there is, arguably, one exception). The Town Series is the polar opposite, in which the camera effectively denies the characters any sense of subjectivity. This mirrors the social nature of the characters' alienation. In *Taxi Driver* the audience associates with Travis and is very much in his head – the audience sees his world. For Jeon Kyu-hwan, however, the characters are others, whose world we can only surveil, not enter. The denial of

¹ Though there are roots which can be found in Enlightenment philosophers such as Locke and Rousseau (신오현 in 장문길 48; 김종호, 3)

² 김이석 (2012) referencing 신오현 in 장문길, 52-58)

subjectivity is not to be confused with 'objectivity,' as the mise-en-scène often projects this alienation on a spatial level, but it not meant to be a framing of the characters' alienated experience. To give an example, the low-angle shot of Hyung-do driving through the high rise apartments of Seoul are meant to demonstrate his insignificance on a social level, but it is not a projection of the character's subjective *feeling* of insignificance.

This use of mise-en-scène to spatialize the alienation of the characters is a technique central to both *Taxi Driver* and the Town Series. Furthermore, both filmmakers use the metropolis, New York and Seoul respectively (though *American Gigolo* is set in Los Angeles), to represent and spatialize alienation. It is not the simple case of the alienation of the modern individual in the city, but rather the camera is employed to portray the city as a manifestation of the characters' alienation.

Along with the question of alienation is inherently whether or not it can be resolved or if it even managed. The answer to this question is highly determinate by the type of alienation suffered. In the films of Jeon Kyu-hwan, alienation is inescapable, a product of the social system and therefore enduring. There is perhaps the suggestion that if the social system is changed, the alienation may be resolved (in which case the Town Series can be seen as a form of social engagement), but there is little to no hope for the characters within the context of the film. For Schrader, alienation is equally permanent; however unlike Jeon Kyu-hwan the individual has the ability to transcend alienation. To transcend invokes a sort of religious or spiritual transformation, it is the experience of the Transcendent. The Transcendent is a term which is inherently vague and variable, but expresses a meeting with a 'Wholly Other,' whether God or Nature. The result is a "new" world in which the spiritual and the physical can coexist, still in tension and unresolved, but as part of a larger scheme in which all phenomena are more or less expressive of a larger reality – the Transcendent."³ Schrader compares this to 'Zen' (referencing 'mono no aware -物の哀れ' in the Transcendent in Ozu Yasujiro) and it may also be compared to a stoic outlook (in the colloquial sense of the term). The alienation cannot be resolved, as this

³ Schrader (1972), 83

conflict is still present, but through transcendence the individual returns to the world with a sense of unity and renewal. However, this spiritual transcendence does not necessarily have to be a directly religious or with Nature or the Universe; transcendence can just as easily be apparently secular, as Schrader described in relation to the end of Robert Bresson's *Pickpocket* (1959), a film which would heavily influence *Taxi Driver* and whose ending Schrader would mimic in both *American Gigolo* and *Light Sleeper*. The Transcendent is, in this circumstance, achieved by the 'miraculous' expression of and acceptance of love, a phenomenon which Schrader compares with the religious grace of Jesus Christ. Whether Travis attains a sort of transcendence at the end of *Taxi Driver* is quite ambiguous, especially in the absence of an easily discernible 'Wholly Other,' however it is clear that in the highly individualized framework of *Taxi Driver*, such transcendence is possible.

In addition to Bresson's theology, Paul Schrader was heavily influenced by Jean-Paul Sartre and Fyodor Dostoevsky while writing *Taxi Driver*, which contributes to a far more psychological and existentialist interpretation of alienation. Jeon Kyu-hwan, on the other hand, takes a more social constructivist outlook, a form of alienation more in line with the Marxist tradition. It is important to stress that this thesis means in no way whatsoever to suggest that the focal points of the directors are in any way the product of their respective origins, but rather that both use similar cinematic phenomena to express contrasting perspectives on alienation.

Alienation from the existentialist perspective can be described as a crisis of the ego-syntonic, which Shin Oh-hyun refers to as 'self-alienation' (자기소외, more contemporarily described as 'alienation from the self' 자기로부터의 소외). As he cites Marxist philosopher Gajo Petrovic:

The list below elucidates part or all the condition. 1. The ego's split into two contradictory parts is not the product of exterior forces, but the product of an action by the ego itself. 2. This ego splitting does not destroy the unity of the ego; the ego alienated unto itself is nonetheless a single ego. 3. Self-alienation does not operate with the ego to split into two equal parts, but, as a part of the ego comes to function as the whole,

the alienated part comes to hold authority over the other parts of the ego and, as a result, the whole ego becomes alienated.⁴

In essence, self-alienation is *not* the disintegration of the subject as commonly discussed in postmodernism, but a split in the ego (which nonetheless retains unity) in which one part overtakes the other. It is not the same as Freud's repression of the id by the superego, but works as a similar process. It is instead the repression of one part of the self by another incongruent part. However, compared to psychoanalysis, contemporary psychology holds a more useful analysis – it is quite apt that the ego-syntonic be the same term used in psychology to describe that which conforms to the values and volition of the self. Conversely, its antonym, ego-dystonic, describe those actions which do not conform – compulsion, addiction, impulse. It is subsequently reasonable that the ego-dystonic be comparable with self-alienation, and that these acts therefore become acts of alienation.

However, there are multiple criticisms to be leveled at this definition. The first is that self-alienation is not the product of external pressure – this is precisely the opposite of the point we are trying to prove. While the incorporation of external pressures, rather than a sort of Camusian rebellion, can be said to be an action of the ego (it is important to emphasize that this incorporation is on partial and insincere, for where it to be a true inculcation it would be a replacement of one system of values with another and would not be a violation of ego-identity), the external is far more important and pertinent, as we shall see in the criticism of Camus and more broadly in the debate between Marxism and

⁴ 신오현 49-50 citing Paul Edwards (ed.) *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* p. 79 (아래에 열거한 조건 가운데 그 일부 또는 전부를 시사하는 것 같다. 1. 자아가 상충하는 두 부분으로 분화하는 일이 외부의 영향에 기인한 것이 아니라 자아의 행동의 결과이다. 2. 이러한 자아 분화가 자아의 통일성을 말살하는 것이 아니라 자기 소외된 자아는 이러한 분열에도 불구하고 여전히 하나의 자아이다. 3. 자기 소외는 하나의 전체적인 자아의 동등하게 관계되어 있는 두 개 부분의 단순한 분리가 아니라 그 중의 일부가 전체로서의 자아를 대변함에 있어서 타부분보다 더 많은 관리를 가짐으로서 이 부분에서 소외된 타부분은 결국 자아 전체에 대해서 소외되는 결과가 된다)

Existentialism. Kim Tyong-Ho approaches the matter in the opening of his essay *Existence and Alienation* (실존과 소외) quite aptly, stating:

To realize the values or ideas of life's drives, government was created, social systems were formed, economic tools made, and systems of thought were developed.

However, after a time these areas of life become problematized, and that which people have made have today come to block the realization of those values and ideas – from this life itself has become jeopardized... on the contrary, as this is said to dehumanizes humans, they become 'alienated others.'⁵

In essence, the very mechanisms and systems which were established in order to satisfy human desires have, over time, turned on their creators and come to thwart those very endeavors, particularly as modernity brought into the need for a new system of values. In Marxist theory, this represents the development of capitalism and its subsequent alienation of the laborer from his product. However, for our purposes, this concept is particularly representative of the role played by the city in the films. Ultimately, the city becomes its own entity and this entity both represents the alienation of the city-dwellers but also becomes an alienating force unto itself. The social structure also plays a role as an alienating force, particularly in Jeon Kyu-hwan's films, as the characters exist as a sort of alienated class. Appearing dangerous to the society at large, they represent a sort of monster produced by and endemic to their social system, in an almost poststructuralist fashion.

⁵ 김종호, 7. (그 생존욕구가 내세우는 가치나 이념을 현실화할 수 있는 정치형태가 산출되고 사회체제가 정비되고, 경제기구가 조직되고, 사상체계가 전개되어 왔다.

그런데 오늘날 그 어느 생존영역이 문제시된다고 한다면, 그것은 그 영역에 있어서 우리 인간이 산출해 낸 것이 우리 인간의 금일에 있어서의 생존욕구에서 내세울 수 있는 새로운 가치나 이념의 현실화를 저지한다고 하는 것이 아닐까, 이리하여 거기에서는 인간의 생존자체가 위태롭게 된다... 도리어 그것은 우리 인간에게는 우리 인간을 비인간화 한다고 하는 의미에서의 이른 바 <소외적 타자>로 되기 때문이다.)

However, as we shall see especially in the case of Schrader's films, society is not the sole source of alienation. It is quite possible to suffer alienation without necessarily being a member of the alienated class. This is the case of an ego which has been either stunted or cannot be enacted. It is not the division and submersion a part of the ego as described by Petrovic, but rather of the ego being stymied. While, it is not self-alienation, but rather alienation, the result is quite similar. More specifically, it is, in the theories of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, a failure of engagement. Central to engagement in the concept of intersubjectivity; specifically that it is only possible to create oneself through the presence of another. As Sartre describes, "To obtain any truth about myself, I must pass through the other. The other is indispensable to my existence, much as it is to any knowledge of myself."⁶ While Sartre's philosophy of the other delves into the concepts of responsibility and bad faith, it is clear that the other represents not only a psychological necessity for connection, but an existential necessity for the self. Simone de Beauvoir explains a more concrete scenario of a similar philosophy, claiming "If I retreat into myself, the other becomes closed to me; the inert existence is no more than separation and solitude. There is no ready-made connection between me and the world. As long as I am in nature as no more than a simple given, nothing is for me."⁷ Most important is that without action, without a relationship with another, existence is one of exile and loneliness. This is precisely the position of "the Man in a Room," consumed with loneliness, isolated in a solitary room (and in the case of *American Gigolo* and *The Walker*, no matter how lavish) and what prompts Travis Bickle early in the film to utter a phrase extremely similar to that of de Beauvoir "I do not believe one should devote his life to morbid self-attention. I believe someone should become a person, like other people."

1.2 Methodological Concerns

⁶ Sartre (1996), 59 « Pour obtenir une vérité quelconque de moi, il faut que je passe par l'autre. L'autre est indispensable à mon existence, aussi bien d'ailleurs qu'à la connaissance que j'ai de moi. »

⁷ de Beauvoir (1947), 208 « Si je referme sur moi, l'autre est aussi fermé pour moi ; l'existence inerte des choses est séparation et solitude. Il n'existe entre le monde et moi aucune attache toute faite. Et tant que je suis au sein de la nature un simple donné, rien n'est mien. »

There are a number of potential methodological concerns to be had in the construction of this research. It is important to acknowledge the very real risk of an undue departure from the films at hand into a tangential philosophical discussion. This risk is increased in part due to our methodological standpoint. A work of art, literary or filmic, is a means of communication with the reader/viewer. This communication is not always a social or philosophical message, and can be the expression of a particular sentiment. *Taxi Driver* may be a particularly poignant example of this, as the depressed and suicidal Schrader felt a sharp compulsion to write the script. Much like everyday speech, there may be meaning to an expression of which the speaker is not readily cognizant, but whether consciously or subconsciously the artist constructs a work as window through which the viewer/reader is invited to look through and see object as the artist would have them see it.⁸ (Schrader similarly talks of Bresson subtly inculcating the audience with his way of thinking). Treating a work solely within itself ultimately limits its utility; in Sartre's terminology, it ceases to be a study of the literary and becomes a study of the poetic.⁹ Of course, the form and the content of a work cannot be so neatly divided, as the form gives shape to the content. It is, to continue the metaphor, the window's frame and glass, and how the object beyond is seen, or is intended to be seen, is invariably transformed by the lens. The object of this research is, at its core, the philosophical concept of alienation. The means by which this concept is to be explored is through the comparison of the works at hand, with specific attention to how a unique interpretation of alienation is elucidated through the narrative structure and cinematic technique.

It is also quite necessary to warn against delving too deeply into social politics and philosophical alienation without addressing the basic psychological components. This is not meant to run counter to our argument or to serve as an alternative analysis but rather to grasp the mundane root cause and bring it into the fold of theoretical analysis, and in doing so to protect against excessive abstraction. It is a rudimentary attempt to synthesize the philosophical and everyday psychological, a task in which modern philosophy inherently should

⁸ Sartre (1948), 19; 28

⁹ Sartre (1948), 17-9

engage. *Taxi Driver* is, at its core, a story of loneliness and descent into madness. The spatialization of this alienation deals with how that loneliness and isolation is represented cinematically. Put in a different manner, it is our aim to connect the emotions of loneliness and isolation to the philosophical, and essentially existentialist, conception of alienation. In order to bridge this gap, it is necessarily to incorporate existential psychotherapy, a method most prominently associated with Irvin Yalom, but also Rollo May – the connection between existentialist philosophy and psychology is also recognized by psychodynamic psychotherapist, Silvano Arieti.¹⁰

Another major methodological concern is the overwhelming attention paid to Paul Schrader in analyzing *Taxi Driver* as compared to the film's director, Martin Scorsese. Such an approach is by no means without precedence, most notably Rice's essay analyzing *Taxi Driver* through the lens of Schrader's *Transcendental Style in Film*. Hamilton similarly interprets *Bringing Out the Dead* (1999), another Schrader/Scorsese collaboration in such a light.¹¹ It is also important to note that, even in the production phase, Schrader was heavily involved with *Taxi Driver*, and Hamilton also notes Schrader's "contribution to the visualization process,"¹² detailing camera movements in the script. While this is in reference to *Bringing Out the Dead*, the same phenomenon can be observed in the script for *Taxi Driver*, especially in comparison to the scripts for *American Gigolo* and *Light Sleeper*.¹³ The ensemble of the "Man in the Room" films also suggests a good deal of merit in placing *Taxi Driver* within the context of Schrader's works; the prominent themes of obsession, alienation, and loneliness are far more in line with Schrader's idiosyncrasies (so much so that Schrader claimed Travis Bickle is "me without my brains.")¹⁴ As Bliss describes, "In Scorsese, Schrader found a director whose religious intensity matched his own. In Schrader,

¹⁰ Arieti, 428 "Existential philosophy is fundamentally a rejection of the Greek and of most of Western philosophy. It is a purely psychological philosophy, as it advocates examining every phenomenon from a psychological, subjective point of view."

¹¹ Other than *Taxi Driver*, the pair also collaborated on *Raging Bull* (1980), *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), and the less successful *Bringing out the Dead* (1999)

¹² Hamilton, 26

¹³ *Taxi Driver's* strict adherence to Travis's subjective viewpoint, one of the central points of this research, was similarly reinforced by Schrader's intervention (Schrader (1990), 116).

¹⁴ Thompson, 14

Scorsese found the intellectual rigor that most of his early films' had lacked."¹⁵ In short, though *Taxi Driver* was directed by Martin Scorsese, Schrader has a strong presence in both the visual and thematic elements of *Taxi Driver*. Nonetheless, Schrader's synergy with Scorsese certainly cannot be ignored, in particular in relation to Scorsese's 1973 film *Mean Streets*.

The other concern is the multi-faceted nature of Schrader's career; most notably his transition from film critic to screenwriter and director. This has led to his films being far too commonly interpreted in correlation to *Transcendental Style in Film*, even where the analysis is forced, or, as in the case of Nichols, the conclusion that regarding the film in the 'transcendental style' is inappropriate. Schrader similarly claims not to produce films in the transcendental style, but instead 'psychological realism.' The distinction here is a film in 'the transcendental style' and a film dealing with the theme of transcendence. Schrader states "as used in this essay, transcendental style refers to a specific filmic form, although there could conceivably be several transcendental styles in film."¹⁶ That a film not be produced in the transcendental style elucidated by Schrader does not exclude it from dealing with similar themes of transcendence, merely that it does not follow the 'everyday-disparity-decisive action-stasis' through an evolution of minimalist cinematic techniques to an 'overabundant' production quality. Transcendence as a theme is quite endemic to Schrader's works, in part because of his religious background and in part because of the immense influence, almost to the point of fetishism, of Bresson.

In the study of Jeon Kyu-hwan's works, there are fewer readily-apparent methodological concerns. Each film in the Town Series was both written and directed by Jeon Kyu-hwan, and even the casting has a large degree of commonality. The dearth of previous scholarship of Jeon Kyu-hwan's films, while weakening the strength of the discourse, gives a large degree of interpretive leeway. There is also the danger of relying far too heavily on Kim Yi-seok's 2012 analysis of the series, especially give the thematic similarities between the two lines of research. Similarly, there will be a number of instances in which the scholarship on *Dance Town* will be applied to the other films in the series. Given

¹⁵ Bliss, M.; Schrader, P., 3

¹⁶ Schrader (1972), 9

the numerous stylistic and thematic parallels between the films, this is certain not unwarranted; nonetheless there is the danger of attempting to draw a connection where it is inappropriate. The other primary concern stems from the fact that Jeon Kyu-hwan's films are not *exclusively* focused on socially induced alienation. Although alienation as a social phenomenon is far more prevalent in Jeon Kyu-hwan's works, individualized alienation will need to be addressed where it presents itself, along with the associated changes in narrative and cinematic technique.

1.3 Genre and Stylistic Considerations

Taxi Driver is quite ambiguous in terms of genre, a concept which is in itself highly subjective and reliant on the criteria for the division. The first impulse is to place *Taxi Driver* within the vigilante films which became increasingly popular in the 1970's, most notably *Joe* (John G. Avildsen, 1970), *Dirty Harry* (Don Siegel, 1971), *Walking Tall* (Phil Karlson, 1973), *Death Wish* (Michael Winner, 1974) and even Schrader's *Rolling Thunder* (dir. John Flynn, 1977)¹⁷ and, to a lesser extent, *Hardcore* (1979). The very clear ramification of this classification is the right wing nature of the film, in which the right-wing hero violently reestablishes the social order, often breaking the law at the same time; *Walking Tall*'s Sheriff Buford Pusser and detective 'Dirty' Harry Callahan are themselves authority figures while *Death Wish*'s Paul Kersey and *Joe*'s Bill Compton and Joe Curran are average citizens. In many cases, these vigilantes are correcting "criminal adversaries [perceived] as aided by an ineffectual liberal state and caused by the social permissiveness of previous years,"¹⁸ in other cases the images of the Left are directly transformed into the enemy.¹⁹ Both cases are true in *Taxi Driver*. The

¹⁷ Naremore sees Major Charles Rane as a revisiting of *Taxi Driver* in its use of a vigilante Vietnam veteran antihero, where the Vietnam War serves as a minor "epiphenomenon." (Naremore, 34). Schrader would also use *Rolling Thunder* as a vehicle for delving into American racism and imperialism, though his ambitions were thwarted by studio intervention (Schrader (1990), 121).

¹⁸ Lubin, 20 referencing Porter, E. "Affirming and Disaffirming Actions" in Baily, B.; Farber, D. eds. *America in the 70s*. Univ. of Kansas, 2004, Lawrence.

¹⁹ "The vicious southern cops of the Left's *Easy Rider*, *Bonnie and Clyde*, and *Cool Hand Luke* were transformed into the heroic Buford Pusser of the Right's *Walking Tall*; the sympathetic hippies of *Easy Rider* became the psychopathic killer of *Dirty Harry*, equipped with a peace symbol for a belt buckle." Richoux, 40 citing Ray, 300.

liberal society of the late 60's allowed Times Square to decay into a hotbed of drug use, prostitution and violent crime; the end of censorship and loosening of sexual mores are also responsible for Travis's own vice: pornography. Both Sport and his prostitutes are dressed in the manner of hippies, the former complete with long hair and headband. The astrology-believing Iris glibly qualifies the abandonment of her home and prostitution as 'women's lib.' Travis regards both as hostile trends directly resultant from the Left and which must be removed from society, the former violently and the latter through the restoration of conservative values (namely, the traditional family).

These vigilante films often carried motifs from the Western genre from a country setting to the city,²⁰ so much so that critic Pauline Kael would refer to them as "street westerns."²¹ Richoux furthers this parallel, stating "Callahan's famous line: 'I don't know what the law says, but I do know what's right and wrong' represented Frederick Jackson Turner's own image of the typical frontiersman, writing that 'he knew how to preserve order, even in the absence of legal authority.'"²² In the absence of effective governance, order would need to be imposed by a moral individual acting even outside the law. Their strength and moral superiority in turn become the justification for their otherwise antisocial methods. Travis clearly sees himself as such a force, declaring himself as a man who 'stood up to the scum,' especially as Palantine represents the political system's inability to deal with the city's corruption. As Ray notes, Palantine is "another in the long line of good-hearted community men shown by the western to be too weak to deal with the real problems," and, referencing Palantine's conversation with Travis, "the movie made obvious the inadequacy of Palantine's hedging, suggesting, like all westerns, the need for decisive action."²³ Travis's obsession with the .44 Magnum, Dirty Harry's signature weapon, represents another clear allusion to the subgenre. Similarly, there is a marquee during the

²⁰ Lubin, 20

²¹ Ray, 350 referencing

²² Richoux, 41 citing Turner, F.J. *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* Penguin, 2008, London p. 47.

²³ Ray, 353

ending credit sequence which includes a reference to Charles Bronson, the star of *Death Wish*.²⁴

There is a caveat, however, which completely subverts the vigilantism of *Taxi Driver*, and, by extension, the right-wing message of the genre. Rice alludes to the way *Taxi Driver* tricks its audience into identifying with Travis, only to be horrified as he becomes a potential assassin. Ray then takes this logic a step further by placing it into the context of the vigilante films, arguing “the movie thus implied that behind the Right cycle’s fantasies lay madness,” and that it “[equates] the impulse to vigilantism with the impulse that led to assassinations.”²⁵ More important than madness, in the framework of the vigilante film, Travis is a self-appointed restorer of order, but, unlike his counterparts his moral authority is questionable at best. While conservative National Rifle Association CEO Wayne LaPierre infamously declared “the only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun,” *Taxi Driver* suggests the bad guy with a gun earnestly believes himself to be the good guy with a gun. As a result, Ray describes *Taxi Driver* as a “corrected’ Right cycle film,” one in which the ideology of the Right is questioned and in which “appearing to be only another member of the class, opened up the cycle’s basic story to admit previously suppressed, incompatible values.”²⁶ Presenting itself as a right-wing vigilante film in the tradition of *Dirty Harry* and *Death Wish*, *Taxi Driver* is able to subvert right-wing ideology. In this regard, *Taxi Driver* plays the same role for the ‘Urban Western’ as *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956) played for the classical Western; the masculine moral authority becomes (at best) an ambiguous antihero. If Ethan Edwards was representative of “fissures in the masculine ideal” then “Travis Bickle is Ethan Edwards come unraveled.”²⁷

²⁴ Rice, 109

²⁵ Ray, 358; 360

²⁶ Ray, 328 Ray notes that *Taxi Driver* may in many ways have been too careful in its reproduction, such that the “corrections,” or critique of the vigilante, were missed by audiences and even critics. Similarly, when asked if *Taxi Driver* was a success because “it’s strong sense of pent-up anger,” Schrader responded in the affirmative, adding “Godard once said that all great movies are successful for the wrong reasons, and there were a lot of wrong reasons why *Taxi Driver* was successful. The sheer violence of it really brought out the Times Square crowd,” (Schrader (1990), 116).

²⁷ Taubin, 19

In actuality, this element of *Taxi Driver*, though clearly referencing vigilante films, may be again an allusion to *Pickpocket* – Michel asserts that there are a select group of self-selected individuals who, by virtue of their capability or ‘genius,’ are capable of disobeying the law. He asserts this may very well “fix the upside-down world” – a restoration similar to Travis’s aims. In reality, Michel is attempting to excuse his own petty theft, the lifting of wallets and watches with no social ramifications whatsoever. Indeed, Schrader revisits this theme even more explicitly in *American Gigolo*, as Julian asserts that “some men are above the law,” a fact that they “just know; they ask themselves,” as a justification for his prostitution. In *Taxi Driver*, Travis views himself among the morally superior, and seeks to clean and restore the city; but this only serves as an excuse for his violent outburst, the shifting target of which “suggests that his need for an act of violence is primary.”²⁸

Placing *Taxi Driver* within the framework of the vigilante subgenre only serves to address its narrative, but not the cinematic techniques used; these techniques, according to Ray, are instead quite contradictory to the ‘Right cycle’ (in this case, right-wing vigilante films) which prefers to emulate classical Hollywood.²⁹ It is subsequently necessary to address the extent to which this trend, and even *Taxi Driver*, is associated with Film Noir. While to place *Taxi Driver* in the context of film noir, as Taubin and Nam Seung-seok do,³⁰ is a bit excessive; there are nonetheless parallels between the time period as well as transformations of *Film Noir* in the 1950’s and the 1970’s birth of neo-noir (as exemplified by Roman Polanski’s *Chinatown* (1974)).³¹ To dismiss the influence on film noir both on the period and on *Taxi Driver* in particular would be equally

²⁸ Rice, 112

²⁹ Ray, 349

³⁰ “But if *Taxi Driver* owes something to French film of the 50s and 60s, it’s even more influenced by American *film noir*, the genre the French new wave adored. The stylistic relationship is obvious... But most importantly, like *film noir*, *Taxi Driver* is rooted in post-war trauma. What World War II was to *noir*, Vietnam is to the story of Travis Bickle.” (Taubin, 18) While in this section we will more deeply engage in the role of Vietnam in *Taxi Driver*; postwar trauma does not appear to be the central to Travis’s condition as much as he is affected by the shift in his environment post-war.

³¹ “Geoffrey O’Brien has suggested that film noir was not a genre at all but ‘a slick new variety of packaging’ designed to attract dwindling postwar audiences back to the theater with a blend of sex, violence, and fashionable nihilism. If true, the same logic would apply to the 1970s whose confused cultural politics were quite similar to those of 1944-1950.” Cook, 188. Schrader would similarly assert that film noir was not a genre.

inappropriate. Schrader had written an influential study of film noir, and while, in the same vein as *Transcendental Style* it would be fallacious to read Schrader's critical work into his film – while such essays would logically denote influences, they are not roadmaps. However, as Kevin Jackson, editor of *Schrader on Schrader* notes “And at least one passage in ‘Notes on *Film Noir*’ sounds directly predictive of Schrader's most anguished protagonists: ‘...1949-53 was the period of psychotic action and suicidal impulse. The *noir* hero, seemingly under the weight of ten years of despair, started to go bananas.’ Travis Bickle was not far away.”³²

The main crux on which this distinction is the level of social criticism present in film noir. Cook goes as far as to refer to the vigilantes of the 1970s as ‘noir cops,’ pointing in particular to *Dirty Harry*. Along with the conservative backlash, Cook suggests “their [*Dirty Harry* and other police films of the era] high quotient of vigilantism seems to confirm the argument of Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner in *Camera Politica* that the 1970s *film noir* revival signaled the death of political liberalism.” Cook subsequently asserts that *Taxi Driver* is “the most critically acclaimed *film noir* of the decade.”³³ This analysis would seem to suggest a social component of *Film Noir*, yet it seem quite inadequate in one crucial area – in the vigilante films of *Dirty Harry* and *Death Wish*, the main character fights for society with the belief that “the belief that problems in society were redeemable by the direct, confrontational approach of the mythic official hero.”³⁴ The distinction is best encapsulated in the closing of the Neo-Noir film *Seven* (David Fincher, 1995). After his partner illegally avenges the brutal murder

³² Schrader (1990), 34

³³ Cook, 192; 197 However, while the argument here is that this death was in the face of ‘the economic realities of corporate capitalism and the military-industrial state,’ our argument is that this death was caused by the failure of liberal politics to alleviate the political turmoil of the period – whether the legal restraints against Callahan in *Dirty Harry* which prevent him from apprehending a serial killer, the inefficacy of the police in *Death Wish*, and, very likely Palantine perceived inefficiency in *Taxi Driver*. While Palantine's political affiliation is never really revealed (though in 1976 there was only a Democratic Primary), upon hearing Travis's extreme distaste for New York, answers with the transparent platitude “I know what you mean, Travis, and it's not going to be easy. We're going to have to make some radical changes.” The script also suggests, if not Palantine's, then Schrader's, conservative politics, noting that “*Palantine is not a Hubert Humphrey-type* [Democratic candidate in the 1968 election] *professional bullshitter*” (Schrader, (2002), 45).

³⁴ Richoux, 39, referencing Ray, 245. Richoux's focuses here on the real life example referenced in the quote above is Jack Ruby, the man who killed Lee Harvey Oswald, President John F. Kennedy's assassin, before applying the same mentality to ‘Right Cycle’ films, particularly *Dirty Harry*.

of his wife, detective Lieutenant William Somerset quotes Ernest Hemmingway, "The world is a fine place, and worth fighting for," adding "...I agree with the second part." This is the mentality of much of film noir, and, as Schrader notes noir films often featured war veterans who return to find "the whole society something less than worth fighting for."³⁵ The vigilante films of the 1970s would espouse the whole of Hemmingway's statement without the addendum and instead "pin all of society's problems on one locatable source (that could be dealt with straightaway)."³⁶

This seems a minor distinction, and *Dirty Harry* and *Death Wish* can be disqualified as a film noir for a number of other reasons; however the essence is not whether or not society is worth redemption, but rather that both film noir (social corruption) and the vigilante film (social redemption) focus on a social consciousness. *Taxi Driver* loans itself to the interpretation of being a 'corrected right cycle' film critical of right wing ideology, but is in essence "a personal film, not a political commentary."³⁷ Although Naremore suggests that Schrader's interpretation of film noir is "essentially apolitical,"³⁸ Schrader stresses its social aspect both in interviews and in *Notes on Film Noir*.³⁹ With its "neo-expressionist"⁴⁰ techniques and individual psychological focus, *Taxi Driver* is in essence a noir without its social consciousness. This is particularly evident if one views Travis not only as a psychopath - and as even less than a vigilante gone

³⁵ Schrader (1972), 10

³⁶ Ray, 354

³⁷ Schrader (1990),

³⁸ In regards to *Taxi Driver*, Naremore notes "...chiefly because of Scorsese, [*Taxi Driver*] transforms what Schrader regards as the definitive motifs of film noir into a kind of neo-expressionism that is ideally suited to color and wide screens. Perhaps more important, together with Schrader's own essay, it helps to encourage the notion that film noir is essentially apolitical, characterized by pessimism and existential anguish," (Naremore, 36-37).

³⁹ Whether exposing the corruption of society mentioned above (note 19) or, what Schrader refers to as the third phase of film noir (~1949-53) which "got down to the root causes of the period: the loss of public honor, heroic conventions, personal integrity, and, finally, psychic stability," (Schrader (1972b), 12). Schrader similarly asserts "the darkness of *film noir* is much more socially motivated than it is in *Taxi Driver*," (Schrader 1990), 126).

⁴⁰ German expressionism had of course a profound stylistic emphasis on film noir, as Schrader notes in Schrader (1972b), p. 10-11. Among his examples, Schrader points to Fritz Lang's transition from Austria to the United States; Faber would refer to *Taxi Driver* as a "jamming of styles: Fritz Lang expressionism, Bresson's distanced realism, and Corman's low-budget horrors," (Faber, 754).

wrong – but primarily as Schrader’s own suicidal fantasies projected onto Arthur Bremer⁴¹ and put to paper.



[Fig. 1] Would-Be Assassin Arthur Bremer



[Fig. 2] The Psychopath’s Second Coming

The cinematic style of *Taxi Driver* is rendered all the more problematic by the Scorsese/Schrader collaboration. Both filmmakers included in the New Hollywood and more specifically among the ‘Film Brats’ of the late 60s and early 70s. Unlike their predecessors, many of the film directors of this period, including Scorsese and Schrader, attended film school and were heavily influenced by the French Nouvelle Vague. This influence is certainly present in *Taxi Driver* but is also apparent in the majority of Scorsese’s and Schrader’s early works. For Schrader this influence is more referential (motifs and allusions) than stylistic (cutting patterns, use of focus, etc.), such as mimicking the coldness of Godard’s *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d’elle* (1967) in *American Gigolo*.⁴² Scorsese’s imitation is far more stylistic but, as Ray points out, unlike its French predecessors “*Taxi Driver*, in other words, abided by the American Cinema’s fundamental assumption that style should serve narrative.”⁴³ These stylistic differences form a sort of synergy which ultimately reflects the themes of *Taxi Driver*. Connecting style and theology, Schrader claims:

⁴¹ Faber contrasts Bremer’s thirst for fame as told in his diaries with Travis’s preoccupation with “Freudian areas (like sexual frustration)” and “religious theories (like ritual self-purification),” (Faber, 754) concerns which are commonplace in Schrader’s works.

⁴² Schrader (1990), 160

⁴³ Ray, 351. Ray cites in particular Scorsese’s use of “unrealistic, hallucinatory colors, blurred focus, and antimelodic score” as well as the jump cuts which “seemed a natural way to express the protagonist’s incipient breakdown (*ibid*).

I wrote an essentially Protestant script, cold and isolated, and Marty directed a very Catholic film... Travis Bickle is not a character that Marty Scorsese would ever think of or come up with; and that atmosphere is not one that I would come up with... Protestantism has a more individualistic, solipsistic, righteous quality. The Catholic thing is more an emotional, communal flurry... Travis's personality is built as if it were a Protestant church, but everything around him is acting differently.⁴⁴

In essence, the reserved demeanor of Schrader's character and the psychological realism⁴⁵ of his script are alienated in the New Wave 'neo-expressionism' of Scorsese's camerawork, further emphasizing the split between Travis and his environment.

The study of genre becomes all the more ambiguous in the Korean context. First of all, the narrative/technical implications of genre are different in the Korean context (the conventions of a Korean spy film are not those of an American spy film) and there are genres prevalent in Korea which do not match with American genres (most notably, Korean 'Youth films (청춘영화)' do not correspond to the 'Coming of Age' films common in the United States). Moreover, in contemporary film criticism, independent films are often contrasted with genre films. In part due to budget, and in part due to the greater artistic liberty granted outside major studios, independent films do in fact work outside of genre conventions more commonly than high budget commercial cinema. Nonetheless, there are a number of low budget, independently produced and distributed would clearly fall under genre conventions, whether comedies, horror films, or science fiction. This is not to say that there are not a number of narrative or stylistic

⁴⁴ Thompson, 13

⁴⁵ It is important to clarify how psychological realism differs from Jeon Kyu-hwan's realism; unlike the realism in Jeon Kyu-hwan, which emphasizes a minimizing of music, narration, acting, etc., psychological realism utilizes voiceover narration, background music and mise-en-scene to reflect the character's mental state. There is a sort of balancing act as this distortion cannot become so pronounced as to delve into the realm of the fantastic (such as, for instance, Roman Polanski's *Repulsion* (1965), in which the audience is privy to the main character's hallucinations).

trends among independent films (such as those identified by Nam Da-eun). Nonetheless, qualifying Jeon Kyu-hwan's films is even more difficult, especially *Mozart Town* given the sparse, disjointed narrative. Identifying the films under the umbrella term of drama, although appropriate, is not particularly useful in discerning thematic or narrative convention. Although genre naturally has implications concerning style and narrative structure, it is subsequently most advantageous to focus attention specifically on these elements of Jeon Kyu-hwan's Town Series.⁴⁶

There is, however, a recent trend which is necessary to point out is connection between *Dance Town* and the recent rise of films involving North Koreans residing in South Korea.⁴⁷ There are a number of reasons for this, the most notable of which is the boom in the population of refugees since 2000.⁴⁸ Even within this trend, Oh Young-sook notes two main streams: the first are blockbuster films, predominantly spy films, in which the North Korean is suspicious, if not an overt threat, to both the society within the film and to the audience as well.⁴⁹ The second, usually lower budget, independent films, focus on accurately representing the lives of North Korean refugees, whether the process of arriving in South Korea or their lives after arrival.⁵⁰ Sung Kyung Suk similar

⁴⁶ It is important to emphasize the extreme stylistic departure of the psychological and experimental *The Weight*.

⁴⁷ As noted by Oh Young-sook, Sung Kyung Suk, and Kang So-hee, among others.

⁴⁸ Between 2007 and 2011 there were over 2,500 refugees annually and almost 24,000 between 2000 and 2012. These refugees are approximately 70% female (강소희, 134).

⁴⁹ This strain is not a simple black and white struggle, but deals with issues of identity, community, and international relations. Nonetheless, the action elements rely heavily on "the secrets and conspiracies intertwined with international relations." (국제간의 이해관계가 얽혀 있는 비밀과 음모이다) (오영숙 (2012), 192 All further citations of 오영숙 refer to this essay unless otherwise noted). Contrary to popular belief, the spy thrillers of the 1960s were not as black and white either, as the discovery of familial ties between Northern and Southern spies was a common motif, implying a common Korean identity (which invariably led to the Northern spy's defection to the Republic of Korea), (오영숙 (2009), 56-62). These two periods do use the motif of family quite differently; while in the 1960s family was used as a "group embodying state ideology" (국가이데올로기를 체현하는 집단)" (김영준 • 김승경, 259), in the past two decades, the threat is not to the nation, but to the protagonist's family, which he protects even at the expense of the nation. (김영준 • 김승경, 257-9).

⁵⁰ 오영숙 190; 192

suggests that this last subset, refer to *The Journals of Musan* (무산일기) (Park Jung-bom 박정범, 2010) and *Dance Town*, work as a critique of South Korean society through the eyes of North Korean refugees.⁵¹

Kim Ji-mi draws a similar dichotomy, also largely along budgetary lines, in her juxtaposition of *Animal Town* and <돌이킬 수 없는>⁵² (Park Soo-young 박수영, 2010) with *The Man from Nowhere* (아저씨) (Lee Jung-bom 이정범, 2010), *I Saw the Devil* (악마를 보았다) (Kim Ji-un 김지운, 2010). In the first two, representative of blockbuster-type genre films, the monster is an unambiguous and immoral threat, and the audience receives visual pleasure through identification with the idealized protagonist protecting society.⁵³ The latter two films, however, are far more nuanced, and suggest that the monster is not separate from society, but is, in different ways, the society itself.⁵⁴ The analogy between the two analyses breaks down in that Jung-lim is not actually a threat to society, and while her being under constant surveillance drives forth her sense of alienation, it does not produce the same threat it seeks to ameliorate. Nonetheless, the films are parallel in their exploitation of audience identification with the subject and the use of that identification as a means of critiquing overall society.

In regards to filmic style, Jeon Kyu-hwan's films are consistently designated as 'realist' films. While the exact terminology varies between 'realist', 'naturalist', or 'hyper-realist', there is a consistent emphasis on long cuts, lack of music, and other techniques which suggest that the camera is only an observer and cannot intrude into the action of the film. This technique is by no means without aesthetic precedent – both the cinematic technique and narrative structure. This is specifically that of Italian Neorealism. As Andre Bazin describes the works of Vittorio de Sica, he states "In the realm of means of expression,

⁵¹ Sung, (369).

⁵² No official English title – translates as *Irreparable*.

⁵³ Kim Ji-mi does note the nuance in *I Saw the Devil*, where this audience identification is used to betray expectations and question the narrative convention, (김지미, 416). This is not dissimilar from the way identification with Travis is used to problematize the Vigilante subgenre.

⁵⁴ As Kim Ji-mi formulates it, "The danger is not desire, but shoddy society" (위험한 것은 욕망이 아니라 구멍투성이의 사회), (김지미, 417).

neorealism runs counter to the traditional categories of spectacle – above all, as regards acting... The structures of the *mise-en-scène* flow from it: *décor*, lighting, the angle and framing of the shots, will be more or less expressionistic in their relation to the behavior of the actor.”⁵⁵ The inference is that, along with the use of amateur actors, that is to say actors who have not been trained and do not emote in ‘expressionist fashion,’ the cinematic technique is similarly stripped of all pretense. The result is twofold; the first is a near absence of the ‘dramatic’ in favor of a more documentary type of filmmaking.⁵⁶ The other, paradoxical result in Jeon Kyu-hwan’s films is a sort of ‘cold-hearted’ camera, one which cannot enter the lives of the characters and subsequently only observes them, taking no judgment. This is, in a sense, a method of alienating the audience from the action onscreen.

This realist style has a very impact on the themes of the film and more importantly its role vis-à-vis the audience. There are instances in which Jeon Kyu-hwan’s films break from strict realism (and these breaks will need to be addressed), the overall reliance on this cinematic technique, to the point of emulating a documentary, reflects cinematic realism’s history usage. As Henri Agel notes, one of the antique uses of realist cinema is as “cinema engagé, “where the directorial intention was to inspire the audience to direct social action.”⁵⁷ The realist film itself may not be emotive in terms of technique or narrative, but it accomplishes its emotional function in convincing the audience of its verisimilitude. It is in a sense an extension of the suspension of disbelief – not only does the audience engross itself in the action of the film in the theatre, they take the contents of the film as representative of the reality outside of theatre. As Kim Yi-seok describes the Town Series,

⁵⁵ Bazin, 65

⁵⁶ Kim Yi-seok states of Jeon Kyu-hwan, “With seemingly no interest in any cinematic technique other than the camera’s intense power to recreate reality, the film feels like an anthropological documentary” (카메라 가진 강력한 현실 재현의 기능 외에는 다른 영화적 기교에 대해서는 아무런 관심도 없는 것처럼 보이는 그의 영화는 마치 인류학적 다큐멘터리 같은 느낌을 준다), (김이석 (2011), 128).

⁵⁷ “Between World War I and World War II realist films and cinema engagé were no longer distinguishable the one from the other.” 아젤, 71

Jeon Kyu-hwan's films are even more emotionally dry than those of Kim Ki-duk, and on a technical level are by a step more simple. What is important is that even though cinematic technique and narrative have been simplified, Jeon Kyu-hwan's films nonetheless have an enormous influence in drawing in the audience. His films are energetic enough to say that his films are not displayed on a screen, but are instead projected towards the audience; and source of this strong power is the recreation of reality through hyperrealist techniques.⁵⁸

The effect is very provocative, whether a call to action, as the term 'cinema engagé' would insinuate, or of anxiety; these two concepts are far from mutually exclusive. As Henri Agel describes Vittorio de Sica's *Umberto D.*,

The impoverished characters of this film more strongly urge a feeling of solidarity than the other characters. The reason for this is that within the context of the action, they are incapable of solving their own problems. The public feels responsibility, and feel a duty to find a solution to their realistic problem.⁵⁹

The same principle applies to the Town Series – the characters within the film are completely incapable of alleviating their own alienation, and the audience is subtly moved towards a sense of social obligation. It is important to emphasize There is previous scholarship which suggests the contrary; building off of Nam Da-eun analysis of the trend contemporary Korean independent films and applying it to *Dance Town*, Kang So-hee instead suggests the Town Series is a cinematic representation of the inability to intervene in the lives of the social

⁵⁸ 김이석 (2011), 128. (전규환의 영화는 김기덕의 영화보다 정서적으로 건조하고, 기교적인 측면에서는 한층 더 단순하다. 중요한 점은 이처럼 영화적 기교나 수사를 취소화시켰음에도 불구하고 전규환의 영화가 엄청난 흡인력을 발휘한다는 점이다. 사실 그의 영화는 스크린 위에 투사되는 것이 아니라 관객들을 향해 날아든다고 말해도 좋을 정도로 강렬한 에너지를 뿜어내는데, 이런 강렬한 힘의 원천은 극사실주의적인 기법을 통해 재현된 현실 그 자체다)

⁵⁹ 아젤, 74-5. (가난한 사람들은 이 영화의 다른 인물들보다 더 연대의식을 요구하고 있다. 그 이유는 그들은 극의 내적 면에서 그들의 문제를 해결 못하기 때문이다. 대중들은 책임을 느껴야 하고 어떤 사실이 기인된 문제에 있어서 구체적인 해결을 찾아야 할 의무를 느낀다)

‘other.’⁶⁰ There is, however, a difference between being unable to do more that observe the ‘other’ and being unable to affect change in their lives. The nuance is that this interaction can only be indirect, that is to say be affecting the society which produces the other – as we will attempt to argue, the other is inexorably alienated both within the context of films and the society which the films reflect, namely modern Korean society. This does not, however, preclude any possibility of social change. For instance, Kim Ji-mi delineates a number of threats that *Animal Town* implies,⁶¹ but in doing so also identifies a number of social problems which can actively be solved. Moreover, the anxiety provoked by the realist style of the film gives the audience all the more motivation to pursue actively the solution. Rather than simply being a fatalistic cry of despair, Jeon Kyu-hwan’s films state solely that without the necessary social change, the alienated class cannot be rid of its alienation. It is the presentation of alienation as a social phenomenon above and beyond the individual who experiences it.

⁶⁰ “It is not the assertion that the film cannot be intervene [in society], but rather that it is the cinematic expression that social intervention or reform is impossible,” (이 영화들은 개입할 수 없다,고 주장하는 게 아니라 개입하거나 규정할 수 없다는 믿음을 영화적으로 형상화하는 것이 중요하다고 생각한다) (남다은, 24). Nam Da-eun refers to a number of recent Korean independent films, among which she includes *Animal Town*. Kang So-hee’s formulation is even more pessimistic “[Jeon Kyu-hwan]’s films suggest that, since the other cannot be approached by any means, that this world is hopeless and life is but repetition without escape.” ([전규환]의 영화는 어떤 방식으로든 타자에게 다가가는 것은 불가능하며 그래서 이 세계에 희망은 없다는 것, 단지 우리의 삶은 출구를 찾을 수 없는 일상의 반복에 불과하다고 말한다), (강소희, 146).

⁶¹ Among these are an ineffectual state medical system and a welfare system incapable of adequately protecting children (김지미, 420-1)

Chapter 2. *Taxi Driver*

Taxi Driver, much like Jeon Kyu-hwan's town series, employs the city, and by extension space as a whole, both to symbolize and create the characters' alienation. However, as we will discover, the type of alienation prevalent in *Taxi Driver*, and subsequently the potential outcome is quite different, and more various and nuanced. Though there are both a large degree of differences and similarities in the ways in which alienation is spatially represented, particularly in the use of cinematic technique and the role of the city, there is quite clearly a different philosophical underpinning to this representation and to its conclusion.

However, in analyzing Schrader's works, the true problem comes from the possibility to confound his critical writing with his screenwriting and directorial work. Most famous are Schrader's essays on Film Noir and especially his masters' thesis, *Transcendental Style in Film*, a comprehensive analysis of the works of Yasujiro Ozu, Robert Bresson, and Carl Dreyer. There is a strong temptation to look at Schrader's from the perspective of his theory of the transcendental style; a temptation to which many scholars have succumbed. While Paul Schrader insists, I believe appropriately, that his films should not be considered to be made from the transcendental style, there are nonetheless a number of commonalities between his critical theory and his own filmmaking. While this is seemingly not the product of an intentional stylistic integrity, Schrader's films do contain certain elements of this style, primarily because of the immense influence of Bresson on his works. In addition to his frequent references, both in his films as well as in interviews and critical essays, to Bresson's *Journal d'un curé de campagne* (1951), *Un condamné à mort s'est échappé* (1956) and most notably, *Pickpocket* (1959), which would loan its ending to both *American Gigolo* and *Light Sleeper*, as well as figure in the #4 film in Schrader's proposed Film Canon.⁶² They also share a very similar philosophy concerning the use of plot.

⁶² Schrader (2006), 48 Schrader notes that his list features, arbitrarily, only one film per director, and that he may easily have replaced *Pickpocket* with *Journal d'un curé de campagne*. Ozu's *Tokyo Story* (1953) would enjoy 2nd place while Jean Renoir's *Les Regles du Jeu* (1939) would be considered most canonical.

Bresson would claim: "I try more and more in my films to suppress what people call plot. Plot is a novelist's trick."⁶³

In contradiction to the neorealist style described by Bazin, or Schrader's own description of Bresson and the transcendental style, Schrader asserts that he has his "roots in psychological realism and audience identification with the character,"⁶⁴ and while he notes the contrast in the referenced interview; in *Transcendental Style in Film* he further explains in citing Bresson "I do not like psychology and I try to avoid it.' Psychological acting humanizes the spiritual, 'good' psychological acting even more so than 'poor' psychological acting."⁶⁵ The tension between these stylistic influences, as well as the philosophical and theological underpinnings heavily influence the means by which Schrader utilizes space as an expression of alienation, and ever more importantly the characters' ultimate means of coping with this alienation.

2.1 The City as Monster

Schrader's films also quite prominently feature the city, especially New York and Los Angeles. While the depiction of New York in *Taxi Driver* is complicated by the fact that the film was shot by Martin Scorsese, who has a strong reputation as a 'New York director,'⁶⁶ the city is featured quite prominently,⁶⁷ perhaps even more so in the script. The urban stratification mentioned previously by Clapp's view of metropolis is hinted at in Schrader's

⁶³ Schrader (1972), 64, citing Armes, R. *French Cinema since 1946, Vol. I: The Great Tradition*, A.S. Barnes, Cranbury NJ, 1966. In the preface to his collected screenplays, Schrader would proclaim "Plot is tricky in character studies. Ideally they should be plotless, dwelling on the complexities and contradictions of human behavior, guiding the viewer to one of several conclusions. That's unrealistic in the commercial cinema. The trick is to have just enough plot so that it seems like something is happening, but not so much that the viewer thinks it's about plot." (Schrader (2002), viii).

⁶⁴ Bliss (2000), 9

⁶⁵ Schrader (1972), 65-66 citing *Interview recueilli par Michel Capdenac in Les Lettres Françaises*, no. 928, May, 1962

⁶⁶ Nearly half of Scorsese's films take place in New York (10/21 - this figure was 8/12 prior to 1990).

⁶⁷ Schrader had originally intended setting *Taxi Driver* in Los Angeles. However, feeling that taxis were far more associated with New York, he changed the setting. Unfamiliar with New York, the original script was full of geographical errors, which New York native Scorsese would correct. (Macnab). While some geographical points are significant to the film, it is moreover the use of the cityscape which is most salient.

notes in the script that “the high-class theater patrons crowding out of the midtown shows are shocked to find that the same rain that falls on the poor and common is also falling on them.”⁶⁸ More indicative, however, of the synonymous nature of the city and its denizens is Schrader’s note that “Our eyes scan the long line of pedestrians. The regulars – bums, junkies, tourists, hookers, homosexuals, hippies – they mean nothing now. They only blend into the sidewalks and lighted storefronts... This is Travis’s world: dark side streets, garish glaring main streets, quick glances, quicker evaluations – a dozen instantaneous decisions a minute. Are these people, are these objects?”⁶⁹ This is in turn reflected in Travis Bickle’s statement that “this city here is like an open sewer,” demonstrating literal nausea while simultaneously displaying his odium for the city itself.⁷⁰

It would be fallacious to interpret *Taxi Driver* (or any of the other ‘man and his room’ films) as a film about the city. As Roger Ebert notably opens in his 1976 article, “*Taxi Driver* shouldn’t be taken as a New York film; it’s not about a city but about the weathers of a man’s soul, and out of all of New York [Travis] selects just those elements that feed and reinforce his obsessions.”⁷¹ Though the city plays a central role in the construction of the film, the film does not take the city as its central subject. *Taxi Driver* is not a film of ‘urban alienation,’ but a film in which the city, as seen by Travis via the camera, reflects a far more existential aspect of alienation. Schrader makes a similar comment: “he [Travis] is the one making the world sordid, and you come to realize that the gimmick of the movie is to make you identify with him for simpler reasons, *such as feeling oppressed by the city.*”⁷² Again, the ‘selecting man’ is the one who dictates the presentation of New York. By ensuring that *Taxi Driver* takes place solely from Travis’s perspective, the subjectivity of the individual is emphasized through his transformation of the mise-en-scene.

This is precisely the reason why *Taxi Driver* contains such a large number of Point-of-View shots; no scene takes place in which Travis is not present. Schrader claims that “everything in the movie should take place from the taxi

⁶⁸ Schrader (2002), 9. This scene was not included in the film.

⁶⁹ Schrader (2002), 41-3

⁷⁰ Haenni, 67 *Taxi Driver* was filmed during a garbage strike.

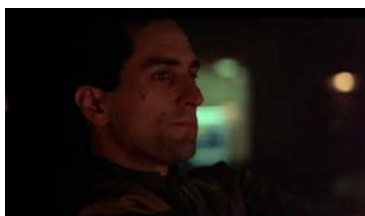
⁷¹ Ebert, 39

⁷² Schrader (1990), 119 emphasis added.

driver's point of view, and if he doesn't see it, it doesn't exist."⁷³ The sole exception is the scene in which Sport seduces Iris; this scene initially stood alone, yet Scorsese later added a shot of Travis looking up to their window, as though he were looking inside. However, given the angle of Travis's POV shot and the placement of the camera within the apartment, it is obvious Travis would not actually be seen to see any of the unfolding action. Scorsese's solution is, therefore somewhat problematic. While we will need to address this scene further, for right now it only needs to be held up as a somewhat problematic exception to the pattern analyzed above.

The scene which is most exemplary of the subjective camera is the "God's Lonely Man" speech. After seeing Iris picking up a john with another prostitute, he cannot help but drive ahead, clearly in dismay. Passing through New York, he laments that "loneliness has followed me my whole life. Everywhere. In bars, in cars, sidewalks, stores, anywhere. There's no escape. I'm God's Lonely Man." As he does so, the camera constantly switches between a mid-level shot of Travis from inside the cab and a POV shot from Travis's perspective looking out to the streets. There are a number of stylistic changes that occur with each shift. The entire interior of the cab is obscured; while there is faint light coming from street lamps and storefronts, it can barely penetrate the darkness of the cab. The streets, however, are teeming with denizens, very few of whom are alone. The feeling of night is less present as the bright lights of stores and theatres come to the foreground such that in some frames there is almost the appearance of daylight. More importantly, the light reaches and illuminates them. In contrast to the claustrophobic cab, where Travis's shoulders are barely visible, Travis's viewpoint shows the city dwellers from at least the waist up, if not more. In a word, they appear fuller than they presumably are. Perhaps the most striking shift is the fact that the shots of the street are shot in slow motion, which invokes a surreal and almost dreamlike sensation for the viewer – it is Travis's idealization projected temporally on the scene.

⁷³ Schrader (1990) 116



[Fig. 3] Travis broods melancholically in his dark taxi.



[Fig. 4] Travis's POV: Couples together on bright streets

There are two main points to be taken from this scene. The first is Travis's feelings of alienation and isolation are physically manifested through a variety of cinematic techniques; he is literally separated by the film's lighting, camera angle, and film speed. The second, and perhaps more important, is the representation of Travis's tendency to idealize the lives of others. The slow motion sequences give the audience a nearly surreal or dreamlike impression, and combined with the lighting and grouping, it becomes apparent that the shots, seen from Travis's viewpoint, are of a reality upon which Travis's idealized interpretation has been superimposed. He not only feels isolated from others, but that his lifestyle is fundamentally inferior to theirs. Alone in his room Travis declares his desire to "become a person like other people." During his "God's Lonely Man" speech, Travis looks through his window at the 'people' among whose ranks he wishes to join.

Ebert draws a similar conclusion on Scorsese's use of slow motion throughout the film, stating that "But Scorsese was finding a personal use of it, a way to suggest a subjective state in a POV shot."⁷⁴ However, neither the audience nor Travis knows anything of the city dwellers he observes. Travis hopes "to share or mimic the effortless social interaction *he sees all around him*,⁷⁵" but they may indeed feel as lonely and melancholic as he does. Indeed, "perhaps [his aloneness] is why so many people connect with [*Taxi Driver*]... We have all felt as alone as Travis. Most of us are better at dealing with it."⁷⁶ One would have little trouble imagining that if Travis could have look in on his own conversation with Betsy at the café, with all of their maladroit moments, he would undoubtedly have

⁷⁴ Ebert, 275

⁷⁵ Ebert, 272 (emphasis added)

⁷⁶ Ebert, 272

envisioned them romantically, imagining the two connecting in a far less awkward scene.⁷⁷

2.1.1 A Taxi as a Metal Coffin.

While we have begun to address the cinematography of Travis's alienation, we have so far only touched upon the spatial aspect thereof. Now it is necessary to delve further into the precise role of Travis's taxi and its relationship to surrounding New York. It would appear that the role is twofold – one for Travis and one for his passengers. For his passengers, the taxi is less a mode of transportation than a means of escaping the public scrutiny. While he would obviously have customers with a few incidents, we do not see them. The number of sordid characters who pass through Travis's cab suggests that such events are more than commonplace, so much so that Travis confesses that every day he has to clean semen, and oftentimes blood, out of his taxi. Travis's passengers seek refuge from the city, and the society it represents, in a separate, anonymous space – a taxi. While this topic has been referenced in interviews with de Niro, this is perhaps best exemplified by a piece of dialogue removed from the café scene between Travis and Betsy. Talking about his job, Travis states, "Oh, yeah. People will do anything in front of a taxi driver. I mean *anything*. People too cheap to rent a hotel room, people scoring dope, people shooting up, people who want to embarrass you. It's like you're not even there, not even a person. Nobody knows you."⁷⁸ While Travis clearly sees violence, prostitution, drug dealing on the street, the majority of passengers in his taxi would otherwise be seen as 'decent' in other circumstances, whether the adulterer or even the killer who "would never kill anybody,"⁷⁹ their grooming and attire suggesting 'respectable' middle-class salarymen.

⁷⁷ Instead, the disconnection is underscored by the camera; whenever Betsy is speaking, the two are filmed over Travis's shoulder, but when Travis speaks, he is alone.

⁷⁸ Schrader (2002), 37

⁷⁹ Thompson, 13. It is unclear whether he means simply that the character is the type who would normally kill anybody but has snapped, or whether he in fact did not complete the murder. Schrader continues saying "the man in the back seat gets his energy off; Bobby never does." While this statement is similarly ambiguous, it implies that the process of contemplating the murder and waiting outside the apartment was sufficient to quell the passenger's homicidal urges.

The apparent class of the passengers is important specifically because of the issue of space. Prostitutes, pimps, drug dealers, and all other sorts of 'animals,'⁸⁰ as Travis refers to them, are capable of acting on the streets – in public – chiefly because they are of a social class which is deemed low enough to engage in their sordid behaviors. Those of higher social standing, however, would draw social censure for the same actions and subsequently require privacy. In this regard, the taxi becomes a space separate from society in which passengers paradoxically limited by the higher social standing are capable of indulging in their passions. The fact that the behavior be antisocial, or at least deemed antisocial, is irrelevant. If we remove the issue of addiction, (which, though a real possibility, is not one addressed in the film,⁸¹) these activities are intentional and a manifestation of the true passions of the passengers. In this sense, Travis's taxi is not, for them, a space of alienation, but rather a refuge from the constraints imposed upon them by New York, a geographical location as a social entity.

This is precisely the sort of release which Travis himself cannot find. Much like Ebert's description of Travis's attempts to mimic the social interactions he observes, Travis also vicariously seeks satisfaction through his passengers. It is perhaps in these aims that Travis deliberately seeks a .44 Magnum, the same pistol with which a passenger (played by Scorsese) threatens his unfaithful wife. The same may also be said of his excessive indulgence in pornography. If this is the case, however, it is not only dissatisfactory but serves to exacerbate his feelings of isolation as well as his inner conflict – simultaneously envying and despising the many denizens passing through his cab. One may also argue that Travis's condemnation of these behaviors is also a form of equally unfulfilling vicarious indulgence.

While we will expand upon this idea further along, at this interval it is important to recognize the role of the taxi as it applies differently to Travis as to his passengers. For the passengers, the taxi is a refuge from the dicta of the city, a location in which to indulge in activity normally under interdiction in the city's

⁸⁰ "All the animals come out at night: whores, skunk pussies, buggers, queens, fairies, dopers, junkies, sick, venal." Schrader (2002), 13.

⁸¹ While some may point to Travis's consumption of unspecified pills, pornography, or alcohol as addictive, these issues are at best ambiguous and certainly secondary to (and likely caused by) Travis's sense of loneliness and isolation.

social sphere. For Travis, the taxi serves two, ultimately voyeuristic purposes. The first is an outward one, as the physical sequestration both spatializes Travis's isolation as well as offers him a window, literally and figuratively, through which to observe the denizens he idolizes and those he despises (and yet, in a way, envies both). Andrew Swensen draws a similar conclusion, comparing the *front* seat of Travis's taxi to the apartment in Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*, a text which would inspire *Taxi Driver*, as "the locus of isolation, and stand opposed to the space of the society at large, an alien and hostile 'aboveground.'" ⁸² The second type of voyeurism is an inward one. Not content with simply observing others from an isolated vantage point, when passengers come into taxi, Travis may examine them more closely and their activities with a sort of loathing and vicarious desire (and yet he does not do so directly, but only through the rear-view mirror). Interestingly enough, when Iris first enters Travis's taxi, he initially looks at her through the rearview mirror. He remains fixated on the mirror while Sport drags her off, but as the two turn and walk away, Travis turns around and stares at them as they leave. One of few other passengers whom Travis actually looks at directly is Palantine, whose presence in the cab is an anomaly. This would intimate that Travis directly looks at those passengers who are wholly acceptable to him. Palantine is the only 'respectable' passenger. ⁸³ Iris, despite being a prostitute, is deemed a successor to Betsy's purity, a victim requiring Travis's rescue.

2.1.2 A Man and His Room

This is not to say that Travis does not have a place of refuge, though for Travis 'refuge' is less a matter of comfort than of retreat. Travis, The Man in the Room, frequently isolates himself in his room. It is perhaps in these scenes that Bresson's influence on Schrader become most apparent. The self-perpetuating nature of Travis's alienation through conflicting impulses is exemplified by his consumption of apricot brandy along with milk and bread for breakfast, despite

⁸² Swensen, 272

⁸³ Palantine's advisor regrets having taken a cab instead of a limousine, perhaps placing the taxi (and by extension Travis) in a status somewhere between the upper echelons of society and the near anarchy of the streets.

being anxious to get healthy.⁸⁴ After Travis's is rejected by Betsy, Travis ultimately cloisters himself deeper in his room. Travis begins training himself for a decisive action, one that is violent in nature but undisclosed to the audience, in the same way that the protagonist of *Pickpocket* methodically trains his sleight-of-hand. This would also be alluded to in Travis's manufacturing of his gun slide, a scene which, prior to editing, shot to last for ten minutes.⁸⁵ In this regard, the use of Travis's room as a place of ascetic training shares a number of similarities with the monastic portrayal of Julian Kay's room. This is in no small part due to their common root in Bresson's *Pickpocket*.

Travis's room serves another very important function: it is his place of contemplation. Through Travis's journal entries, the audience is granted a glimpse into his mental state and emotions. As Swensen notes, however, these narrations are often a combination of shots of Travis writing at his table and a montage of his life in the city, resulting in two splits. Namely, there are disconnections between the audio and the visual as well as the 'first person' and the outside observer. Most important is the spatial separation that accompanies the voiceover montages. As Swensen notes, the 'underground' (embodied in Travis's apartment) represents "a psychological and spiritual space, a projection of mental space onto setting."⁸⁶ As a result, these montage sequences represent Travis's inability to reconcile these two spaces; Travis and the city cannot coherently intersect. Or perhaps there is no true change in perspective – whenever Travis is narrating in his room and the narration spills over into the next scene, those scenes are almost always those of him alone in his taxi, often shown through POV shots. This demonstrates a carrying of the 'underground' mentality of his room with him, "[reacting] only out of the distant world in which he lives."⁸⁷ This might explain why he is incapable of expressing himself to others, the majority of his conversations a series of disjointed comments and questions; so much so that

⁸⁴ This diet, along with his belief of having stomach cancer, is taken from *Journal d'un Curé de Campagne*. (Thompson, 11)

⁸⁵ Schrader (1990), 116

⁸⁶ Swensen, 272 referencing Donald, J. *Imagining the Modern City* University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 1999 p. 19

⁸⁷ Kilgore, 1013 Kael also notes "Travis is so disaffected that he isn't always quite there." (Kael, 526)

Ebert referred to *Taxi Driver* as a 'series of failed attempts to connect.'⁸⁸ His writings, before his descent into madness, are far more coherent than any of his conversations with other characters, and perhaps with good reason. Travis ultimately opens himself up to Palantine, revealing his inner thoughts and loathing of the city in a manner far more articulate, albeit vulgar, than any of his other conversations, only to be rebuffed with an uncomfortable, awkward platitude. Unlike his taxi, his room is a place not only of physical isolation but also of brooding mental solipsism. It is not accidental that we see never see anyone visit him.

More importantly, while Travis frequently observes the passers from the window of his cab he is never shown looking out the window of his apartment. His apartment is a location of complete isolation. Indeed, the only building from which he looks out is the hotel in which he purchases guns. Perhaps this serves as a reference to *The Yakuza*, Schrader's first filmed script (and Schrader is nothing if not referential, whether to French New Wave films or his own), "when a Japanese cracks up, he'll close the window and kill himself; when an American cracks up, he'll open the window and kill somebody else."⁸⁹ At this point, it seems inexorable that Travis kill someone – the gun he is purchasing is clearly not for protection. The POV shot looks down Travis's arm as he ultimately rests his sights on two modestly dressed old women in the park – the symbolic opposite of the criminals, addicts, and prostitutes whom he loathes yet surrounds himself with at night. With this shot, his 'listen you screwheads,' monologue rings hollow, as the target of his rage becomes anyone "relative to circumstance and psychological suitability."⁹⁰ This psychological suitability is not reliant on the cleansing of the city, but the most apparent target with some connection to one of the women Travis obsesses over. This is the same reason that Travis's experience in killing the stick-up man does not offer the same release as his final rampage. Travis's

⁸⁸ Ebert, 272 While there is a distinction to be made between a failure to communicate and a failure to connect, a large part of his failure to connect spawns from his failure to communicate (whether the restaurant scenes with his coworkers, his lunch with Betsy, etc. With Palantine, Travis experiences a failure to connect is an exception, his failure to connect is instead a direct product of a successful communication.

⁸⁹ Thompson, 10

⁹⁰ Rice, 112.

attempt to purify the city is a mere pretext to his “need for an act of violence”⁹¹ - Travis is “simply striking out.”⁹²

Whether a place of refuge, contemplation, or sacrament, it is important to recognize dissatisfaction felt by Travis even in his room. As Swensen likens both Travis’s room and the front seat of his taxi as ‘underground’ spaces of the individual mind opposed to a hostile society; this hostility effectively renders Travis’s room a prison. Perhaps again under the influence of Bresson, Schrader’s depiction of Travis’s room also exemplifies the vices which ensnare him - whether the pill bottles, alcohol or pornographic magazines scattered about his room (and perhaps, with the Viet Cong flag hanging, Vietnam as well). As Weinreich explains, “the windows are barred, and *Travis is as imprisoned by his problems and thoughts inside as he is outside.*”⁹³ Travis takes his problems from outside, pornography and loneliness, and brings them into his own, inner space. It is the reason why even as ‘all the animals come out at night,’ Travis turns day to night by retreating to in a pornographic theatre. It is a contradiction fundamental to Travis’s character; he reviles pornography and seeks to end his alcohol abuse while simultaneously bringing both into his refuge.

It is also through the prison metaphor that Travis’s dilemma becomes inextricable from suicidal ideation. Schrader refers to the works of Bresson where “in the prison cycle the natural suicidal extension of the prison metaphor is already evident,” especially where this concerns a bodily prison and a “natural tendency toward self-mortification.”⁹⁴ This is no more apparent in *Taxi Driver* than in Travis’s ascetic transformation. Travis cuts himself off from his sexuality and tests himself by returning to the pornographic theatre. Initially teasing himself by alternately blocking the view with his finger, he ultimately clasps his hand into the form of a gun and points it at the screen. Gone is the conflicted spectator, and in his place Travis becomes a detached executioner (and, most notably, he makes the same gesture to his own head after his violent rampage). The peach brandy at breakfast also takes a new symbolic meaning. Not only does

⁹¹ Rice, 112

⁹² Thompson, 14

⁹³ Weinreich, 96 (emphasis added)

⁹⁴ Schrader (1972) 90;89

it represent the paradox of his trying to clean himself up while continuing to drink, the brandy also serves as a metaphor for self-mortification. As Travis believes he might have stomach cancer, just like Bresson's priest, and he also exacerbates his own condition (though for Travis it is presumably imagined) in a continuous downward spiral.⁹⁵ The most iconic image of self-mortification is Travis's burning himself over his stove, an ascetic endeavor reminiscent of but far different from Charlie (a Catholic) symbolically holding his hands over the candles in *Mean Streets*. For Charlie, the flame is a "hell... eagerly embraced by Charlie as a place to work out his conflicts," for Travis it is a part of the preparation for his 'mission.'⁹⁶ The self-mortification aspect of his training takes place predominantly in his room, demonstrating a suicidal impulse to escape the alienation and isolation of his own room-as-prison. For Bresson this impulse is a meeting with the Transcendent,⁹⁷ in *Taxi Driver*, the conclusion is far more ambiguous.

2.2 Existential Alienation and its Forms

Though we have addressed precisely how Travis's alienation manifests itself in both personal and public social space, we have yet to describe precisely what the source and significance of his alienation is. While this alienation plays itself out physically in the metropolis, there are a number of philosophical differences between Schrader and Jeon Kyu-hwan in their respecting treatment of alienation. As we have intimated previously, being in no small part indebted to its

⁹⁵ "the more ill he becomes the more adamantly the priest refuses to take nourishment or rest... His need for atonement drives him to self-mortification. He eats only small portions of bread dipped in wine, an alcoholic parody of the sacrament." (Schrader (1972), 73-5)

⁹⁶ Kolker, 189. This is quite distinct from the hellish imagery in *Taxi Driver* which encompasses the whole of New York, or at least the sordid areas Travis delves into. The reference to this scene of *Mean Streets* being 'symbolic' and 'catholic' are quoted by Schrader in Thompson, 13. Ebert however draws a connection between the two scenes as a ritual preparing for a "final sacrifice of the 'Mass'" (Ebert, 275). Blake, also working through Scorsese, makes a similar analysis (Blake, 6). However it is important to note that in both cases it is the increasingly erratic, violent, and trapped Robert de Niro (as both Johnny Boy and Travis) who is 'sacrificed' by being shot in the neck. (Kolker, 185).

⁹⁷ Schrader observes in Bresson an inextricable link between self-mortification, the prison, and suicide in the pursuit of the Transcendent. He points in particular to *Journal d'un curé de Campagne* and *Le Procès de Jeanne d'Arc*. Schrader (1972), 79; 82-3; 89-90

inspirational roots in Dostoevsky, Sartre, and Camus,⁹⁸ *Taxi Driver*, and Paul Schrader's films on the whole, takes a far more individualistic, existentialist stance towards alienation.

Between his isolation in his apartment, his inability to connect to others, his romantic failure, and his own direct confessions, it should be more than self-evident that Travis Bickle feels extremely lonely. While loneliness is inherently a subjective experience, it is a product of a perceived deficiency in the relationships of the person experiencing it. How deeply and frequently these relationships need to become in order to feel satisfaction is largely individual, and the individual may be considered for dependent personality disorder or suffer other psychological problems, yet this is beyond the bounds of this essay. For our purposes, the key point is the subjective portrayal of Travis's loneliness, and more importantly, the inquiry into the more basic drives that it seeks to serve – much as physical pain alerts the body to its problems, emotional pain alerts the mind to its own troubles.

2.2.1 The Pornographic Impulse

In the case of Travis, the need to belong manifests itself particularly in sexual behavior. It is not apparent whether or not his sexual fixation is a function of a lack of romantic involvement (a specific type of human connection) or if it is a form of sublimation, where, in the absence of any emotional bonding, sexual or otherwise, the physical becomes an unfulfilling substitute. Schrader's inspiration from his own experience would suggest the latter, as he claims that "I was obsessed with pornography in the way a lonely person is, and all those elements are upfront in the script."⁹⁹ In Schrader's own case, he specifies the sources of his loneliness, including the collapse of his marriage and, after being hospitalized for an ulcer, the realization of not having spoken to another in weeks.¹⁰⁰ While it would be inappropriate to directly attribute Schrader's personal troubles to those of Travis, it is not wholly irrelevant to recognize the connection between them.

⁹⁸ Thompson, 10. Schrader notes in particular *Notes from the Underground*, *Nausea*, and *The Stranger*, as well as Bresson's *Pickpocket* and *A Man Escaped* and Louis Malle's *Le Feu Follet*. (1963)

⁹⁹ Schrader (1990), 117

¹⁰⁰ Thompson, 8; *Easy Riders and Raging Bulls*

Many have pointed out a similar ambiguity in the origin of Travis's pain, and Schrader notes the intentional nature of this, while rejecting similarity to the film *In Cold Blood* (Richard Brooks, 1967), where it "immediately becomes less interesting because his problems aren't your problems, but his symptoms are your symptoms."¹⁰¹ The implication is that the ambiguity of Travis's problems allows the audience to sympathize with him more easily. To return to the need to belong, Travis is incapable of connecting to Betsy and to his coworkers as well, as exemplified by his special disconnection and lack of conversational fluidity in the first café scene. Even with Iris, he responds to her only from his own perspective, without considering hers. Would Travis's mental collapse have been avoided had he simply had close friends, even in the absence of a romantic connection? Fantasy or reality, the ending of the film would suggest such might be the case – Travis is seen connecting with his fellow taxi drivers, but then rejects Betsy's advances. After his catharsis of violence and integration into a social circle, he would appear to no longer need sex.

Travis's sexuality is inseparable from violence. In the film, Travis's sexual frustration is a main factor in his violent outburst; in the script, his sexuality is itself of a violent nature. When Travis is introduced in the script, Schrader describes him as "[having] the smell of sex about him: sick sex, repressed sex, lonely sex, but sex none the less. He is a raw male force, driving forward; toward what, one cannot tell. Then one looks closer and sees the inevitable. The clock spring cannot be wound continually tighter. As the earth moves toward the sun, Travis Bickle moves towards violence."¹⁰² The juxtaposition of Travis's troubled sexuality and his inexorable descent into violence forms an intimate connection between the two. Yet this connection is multifaceted, and in the script violence happens not only as a result of his loneliness but it also adds a violent nature to his sexuality. When Travis's room is first described, among the array of disorganized miscellany are "black-and-white photos of naked women tied and gagged with black leather straps and clotheslines." While we see far less of the pornographic films that Travis watches in the film than in the script, the audience does overhear a male voice yelling "come here, bitch. I'm gonna split you in

¹⁰¹ Ebert, 44

¹⁰² Schrader (2002), 5

half.”¹⁰³ Given that these elements were cut from the final product, their inclusion in a discourse on *Taxi Driver* is somewhat dubious.

Their removal is, however, important for a number of reasons. The first of which is simply to maintain the character’s appeal – not because the violent pornography would cause the audience to disassociate themselves with Travis, but because it would lead them to disassociate with him *too quickly*. As Rice duly notes, one of the main appeals of *Taxi Driver* is its ability to create a main character with whom the audience heavily identifies before turning that identification against them. Were Travis to begin the story in violent sadism, such identification would be almost impossible, especially in a country in which sadomasochism was and still is considered, at best, a minority sexual subculture. Where this becomes particularly pertinent is the second, and far more significant, ramification of the removal of Travis’s sexual sadism and its implications in the scene where Travis takes Betsy to a pornographic film. Travis undoubtedly has insufficient social skills, and so his faux pas may be understandable in this context; Travis, however, does not even engage in the lewd conversations of his coworkers. As we have seen above in the case of his passengers, he longs for such intimacy, even as he condemns it - but he never expresses it openly. Instead he is quite careful to mask it, and therefore his revelation to Betsy appears especially perplexing. It is plausible, given his awkwardness, but his motivations are unclear – this is especially true given that this is one of the few moments where the audience is not privy to Travis’s inner thoughts through narration.

In the script, however, his motivation is revealed. Schrader writes “*compared to the movies he sees, this is respectable. But then there’s also something that Travis could not even acknowledge, much less admit: that he really wants to get this pure white girl into that dark porno theater.*”¹⁰⁴ This implies an element of sadism in Travis’s desire towards Betsy as well (sadism is not necessarily the infliction of physical pain; it can also consist of fantasies of humiliation, corruption or dirtying).¹⁰⁵ The comparison to Travis’s other viewings

¹⁰³ Schrader (2002), 13; 15 In the script, the first time the audience sees the pornographic film itself is not until page 70, directly after Travis kills the stick-up man in the deli. In the final cut, the deli scene cuts directly to Travis watching *American Bandstand*.

¹⁰⁴ Schrader (2002), 48

¹⁰⁵ Taubin goes as far as to qualify the scene as a “kind of rape.” Taubin, 19

is more salient when viewed in the context of the script, but more important is its connection to the sadistic undercurrent of Travis's sexual fantasies in the beginning of the script. Though Schrader notes that Travis's actions constitute a dirtying impulse, it is only as a small addendum; the main thrust being Travis's own guilt, in the script the prime motivator is sadistic.

Whether sadistic or otherwise, violence and sexuality are nonetheless inextricable for Travis. This also offers an alternative explanation to the scene in which Travis's passenger discusses his plans to kill his wife, specifically by shooting her in the head and in the vagina. The passenger's intent to enact such gendered violence reinforces the link between violence and sexual sadism, especially considering that Travis immediately requests a .44 Magnum upon meeting clandestine salesman Easy Andy.¹⁰⁶ It is possible to understand this as Travis's fixation on the sexualized violence that took place before. While Travis focuses on the passenger in the film, in the script, "[the] camera closes in on Travis's face: he is watching the woman in the seventh-floor window with complete and total absorption. It's the same glazed-over stare we saw in his eyes as he watched the porno movie."¹⁰⁷ However the irony of this is that Travis's own violent rampage is not sexualized (while his actions, depending on the interpretation, may involve rescuing the 'pure' women over whom he obsesses, the acts of violence are not themselves sexually charged).

From this, is it not impossible to suggest that Travis's sexual sadism is, much like his compulsive viewing of pornography, a sort of 'tangential' sexuality, an incomplete and dissatisfied sexuality.¹⁰⁸ This goes beyond simple sexual frustration, but is rather a deformed sexual act enacted out of alienation. For these purposes it is valuable to consider Catherine Zuromskis's concept of 'porn-in-film.' In analyzing Schrader's *Hardcore*, she states

¹⁰⁶ Bliss also observes that when Travis first meets Iris, she "tells Travis that her name is 'Easy,' and who, like Andy, travels the streets meeting people to whom she sells her 'good.' Sex (Iris) and death (the weapons that Andy sells) are here verbally linked," (Bliss (1995), 56).

¹⁰⁷ Schrader (2002), 56

¹⁰⁸ "Borrowing directly from a European tradition of existentialism exemplified not only by Bresson but also Fyodor Dostoevsky, Albert Camus, and Jean-Paul Sartre... They center on individuals whose isolation is driven either by paranoia, as in *Taxi Driver*, or by the obsessive pursuit of an ideal, as in *American Gigolo* and *Mishima*. Schrader's representation differs from that of his European counterparts in its overt connection to sexual anxiety." Kouvaros, 40-1

“Thus by the time he, and we, the audience, get our first glimpse of the sleazier side of Los Angeles any possible allure of the pornographic space has been carefully offset by the assumedly preferable (and at the very least morally superior) space of decent midwestern religious life back home. Both visual and narrative framing have the effect of buffering the pornographic text, at once disallowing a full, uncompromised view by situating it within a space of biased representation and contextualizing it.”¹⁰⁹

Taxi Driver utilizes the same mechanisms of a sleazy/decent binary and a subsequent sequestration of pornography, but does not offer an alternative except for the rare ‘people’ Travis views as decent – specifically Betsy, who he refers to as “an angel out of this filthy mass.” Indeed, Travis must not be presented with an alternative to which he has access, for that is a premise for his violent attempt to re-establish his desired order. Travis does have a brief view of the ‘people’ with whom ‘the scum’ are contrasted, such as through his taxi window or through Betsy (or at least his romanticized image of her), but he is never able to join them, living instead begrudgingly amidst ‘the scum.’ What is most salient about Zuromskis’s analysis is the contextualization of the pornographic space, which for Travis becomes the spatialization of alienated sexuality. While this pornographic space is literal in the adult theatre and even Travis’s apartment (while the sadomasochistic nature of the pornography was removed, adult magazines do still litter Travis’s apartment in the final cut), in essence the whole of Travis’s New York is the pornographic space. Moreover, where the pornographic is most literally present, the theatre and Travis’s room (and, to a certain extent, the rundown apartment complex from which Iris works and may possibly be trapped), are in themselves, small, confined, and sequestered spaces, returning both to the prison metaphor described in conjunction with Bresson. In this regard, pornography is subsequently delegitimized not in its contrast to a more moral space, but its conjunction with

¹⁰⁹ Zuromskis, 8

imprisonment and sickness. While Travis's compulsive viewing of pornography mirrors Schrader's own obsession "in the way a lonely person is," Travis has the additional problem of his contradictory view of pornography and by extension of the pornographic space. As Kouvaros explains, "for Schrader, these inconsistencies and contradictions are central to Travis's 'self-imposed' loneliness." Quoting Schrader, this "self-imposed loneliness: that is, a syndrome of behavior that reinforces itself. And the touchstones of that kind of behavior are all kinds of contradictory impulses: Puritanism and pornography at the same time; 'I've got to get healthy' while popping pills at the same time... It's full of things that he does to make sure he'll never get to where he's going."¹¹⁰ After all, Puritanism is, in a perverse sense, simply another way to obsess over sex.

Similar phenomena have been identified by psychologists as well, where sexual stimulation becomes a mood regulator (in Travis's case to assuage his insomnia and the loneliness underpinning it). This often has a self-perpetuating, and self-exacerbating, function. As Bancroft notes "the subsequent recognition of this as a recurring and out-of-control pattern induces further negative mood. This pattern is most likely to be manifested in solitary or masturbatory patterns of behavior."¹¹¹ Travis is certainly cognizant of the negative effect of pornography on him (best exemplified by his mimed shooting of the pornographic actors in the theater; a gesture he later turns on himself), and the negative feedback of his indulgences in pornography would only be made worse by not only recognizing it as a negative pattern, but also having moral qualms over the activity. Travis's subsequent attempt to dirty Betsy in taking her to a pornographic film may also have a masochistic element to it – in bringing 'a person' down to his level, he can receive some solace in regards to his own behavior, otherwise solely the activities of 'the scum.' Taubin argues that, for Travis "Betsy is the Madonna he wants to turn into a whore while Iris is the whore he wants to save."¹¹² However, the reality of Betsy relationship may be the opposite, or at least slightly more nuanced – if even the Madonna is a whore, the binary collapses and Travis's sexual

¹¹⁰ Kouvaros, 19 citing Bouzareau, L. dir. *Making Taxi Driver* on *Taxi Driver* DVD. Columbia Pictures, 1999.

¹¹¹ Bancroft, 857

¹¹² Taubin 18

obsessions become acceptable. In Betsy's rejection, Travis is not only unable to connect, but is also unable to resolve a conflict within himself.

2.2.2 Counter-culture and the Conservative Backlash

While similar films can and have been produced,¹¹³ the resonance of *Taxi Driver* is ultimately only possible within the context of the 1970's. It is within this cadre that Travis's desires and frustrations become most apparent. We have previously discussed Travis's division of the city into 'the people' and 'the scum' - it is important to acknowledge the racial context of this division, as well as how this ties into space. This also reflects not only the history of 1970's New York. During the late 1960s and early 1970s New York was undergoing both a rapid demographic shift resultant from a wave of immigrants from Puerto Rico and White Flight as well as rapid deindustrialization. The de facto boundaries of New York were constantly changing, and, for our purposes, most notable are "the conflicts between Little Italy and Chinatown in the 1970's, when Little Italy, on the verge of being obliterated by Chinatown, reasserted itself and acquired special district status."¹¹⁴ Although this has a very Italian connotation in *Mean Streets*, a similar fear of occupation is clearly evident in *Taxi Driver*.

It is well known that Sport and the rest of the characters in the brothel were originally all African American in the original script, which was change as this was seen as 'an incitement to riot.'¹¹⁵ This fact would give *Taxi Driver*, much like its source material *The Searchers*, a distinctly racial component – the white girl needs to be saved from the savage 'other.' While it is quite clear in *The Searchers* that Ethan Edwards is, at best, an antihero and the rest of his family disapproves of his obsessions and bigotry, in *Taxi Driver* Travis's actions are ultimately met with approval, even if the circumstances surround this approval are ironic (had Travis originally succeeded in killing the senator, the public reaction would be quite different).

Where *Taxi Driver* differs from *The Searchers* is even more significant in its use of space; the 19th century rural Texas of *The Searchers*, the native

¹¹³ (most notably *God's Lonely Man* (Frank von Zerneck Jr., 1996)

¹¹⁴ Haenni, 68; 76

¹¹⁵ Schrader (1990) 117

Comanche, while hostile, clearly 'belong' in the film's space, and the invaders are Texan settlers. In *Taxi Driver*, the image is the opposite, where Travis's (and by extension the white male's) space is continually diminishing and under threat of being extinguished.¹¹⁶ For example, in the first café scene in which Travis is sitting with the other drivers. Recounting the story of a driver who had been assaulted on 122nd street to which Wizard snorts "Mau Mau Land".¹¹⁷ The camera subsequently pans over to the sole pair of African American in the diner, suggesting that even the last (white) refuge of the diner is being invaded. To the extent that the café serves as a frequent rendezvous for the cab drivers, it is in a way 'their space,' and the incursion of the two (who appear as a caricature of a 1970's black pimp). Travis's loathing fixation is further accentuated technically by the slight slow motion with which they are presented. The slow motion, which as we have seen is often used in *Taxi Driver* to emphasize Travis' subjectivity, makes their appearance all the more menacing to the audience.

The division of space and the constant threat to the 'white' space of the diner is further underscored as Travis walks out of the diner with Wizard; the vastly white majority of the diner costumers are directly contrasted, both by lighting and occupants, with the area outside – specifically the bright lights of the diner contrast to the dark, red, space outside, the latter of which is, with the exception of the drivers, occupied by an entirely African American cast, armed passersby and the spat between the youth and prostitutes adding to the feeling of a chaotic space. Taubin suggests that "[Scorsese and Schrader] are not above the impulse to protect what they consider their turf... The entire cast of *Superfly* seems to have been assembled in Times Square."¹¹⁸ - With the perceived threat

¹¹⁶ "The increased racialization of New York City in the context of 'white flight' is most strongly articulated in *Taxi Driver*... As Amy Taubin has suggested, this particular film may be understood 'as an attempt to reclaim – for the embattle white male – the urban landscape that had been revitalized by the Blaxploitation films of the early 70's" Haenni, 75 citing Taubin, A. *Taxi Driver* BFI, 2000, London, p. 15

¹¹⁷ 122nd Street is in Harlem, a historically African American neighborhood. Despite Wizard's derogatory reference, his character seems progressive, expressing support for homosexuals and, unlike Travis, paying no mind to Charlie T's presence - the invasion of their space by 'the other' is a crisis experienced individually by Travis.

¹¹⁸ Taubin, 18 Taubin refers to the film-like nature with which Travis view New York through his taxi (which we have previous explored in part in IA of this chapter); however the division by glass of Travis's space and the 'Blaxploitation' urban landscape which threatens him and which he hopes to

just outside the door of the diner, only a few panes of glass protect Travis and the last bastion of his sought-after 'white' space. Travis's subsequent mission is both the protection of the remaining 'white, heteronormative' space – the space of 'the people' – and the space he seeks to reclaim from 'the scum.'¹¹⁹



[Fig. 5, 6] The diner's bright interior with majority white patronage (not seen here) contrasted with the dark exterior, young African Americans pass by carrying weapons.

2.3 The Transcendence of Existential Alienation

2.3.1 Loneliness and Alienation: Interpersonal and Spatial

Although we have frequently referred to the concept of alienation, we have yet to specify concretely what that entails or differentiate it from common loneliness. In truth, loneliness and alienation are not completely different concepts but, as Existential Psychotherapist Irwin Yalom suggests, 'semipermeable.'¹²⁰ Yalom similarly points to Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward Angel* as having a keen understanding of existential isolation, where the protagonist "understood that men were forever strangers to one another, that no one ever comes really to know anyone..."¹²¹ – Schrader would also use Wolfe's

reclaim equally applies here – though here the emphasis is not on the voyeuristic nature of the division but, in the case of the bar, the thin and fragile division between the two spaces.

¹¹⁹ While 'the scum' and 'the animals' are never detailed in terms of race, the racial component is nonetheless apparent, so much so that both Schrader and Scorsese needed to be quite self-conscious in its representation. ("You know the black man you see raging in the street late in the film, I wanted that to be the opening shot, says Scorsese. 'But there was no way I could do that. It would have seemed too racist.'" Taubin, 18)

¹²⁰ Yalom, 355. Yalom refers to this as 'existential isolation,' however the phenomenon he describes it analogous to the existential alienation described here.

¹²¹ "Yalom, 356, citing Wolfe, T. *Look Homeward Angel* Charles Scribner, 1929, New York)

God's Lonely Man, which is referenced in Travis's monologue, as a preface to *Taxi Driver's* script, stating

The whole conviction of my life now rests upon the belief that loneliness, far from being a rare and curious phenomenon, is central and inevitable fact of human existence.¹²²

This picture is somewhat incomplete; Loneliness is a manifestation of the existential isolation, which is an intimate and inherent fact of human existence. This isolation in turn engenders existential anxiety – it is “the loneliness of being one's own parent.”¹²³ It is the anxiety of being responsible for one's own being and, more importantly, authorship over one's values. There is, however, a fundamental paradox; the existential isolation of the self is necessary for development, yet, simultaneously it is only with and through the other that the self can develop, a phenomenon referred to by Sartre as intersubjectivity. He states :

To obtain any truth about myself, I must pass through the other. The other is indispensable to my existence, much as it is to any knowledge of myself. In this case, the discovery of my self is at the same time a discovery of the other as a liberty in front of me, who thinks and whose values can only coincide or contradict mine.¹²⁴

De Beauvoir takes this concept and applies it on a less metaphysical and more concrete level, claiming.¹²⁵

This is the crisis which Travis bemoans “all my life needed was a sense of some place to go. I don't believe one should devote his life in morbid self-attention. I believe that someone should become a person like other people.” In

¹²² Schrader (2002), 3

¹²³ Yalom, 357

¹²⁴ Sartre, 59 « Pour obtenir une vérité quelconque sur moi, il faut que je passe par l'autre. L'autre est indispensable à mon existence, aussi bien d'ailleurs qu'à la connaissance que j'ai de moi. Dans ces conditions, la découverte de mon intimité me découvre en même temps l'autre, comme une liberté posée en face de moi, qui me pense, et qui ne veut que pour ou contre moi. »

¹²⁵ See note 6 of the Introduction.

addition to the previously discussed class and moral prerequisites for becoming a 'person,' Travis asserts that in order to develop truly, a person needs to be connected to others, the other is, in line with Sartre's intersubjectivity, necessary to the self. The isolated being is 'morbid,' effectively non-living, and the direct opposite of a 'person.' In Yalom's terms, "To the extent one truly 'turns toward the other,' one is altered. To the extent one brings the other to life, one also comes more fully alive."¹²⁶

There is a very real question of how aware Travis is of his own predicament – while he clearly understands that loneliness is the central problem of his being, it is unclear the extent to which he grasps its roots in existential alienation. While he acknowledges the necessity of the other and inadvertently quotes Thomas Wolfe, he does not enter the philosophical depths as Dostoevsky's Underground Man does. Travis is ultimately most similar to his source inspiration, would-be assassin Arthur Bremer, who, according to Taubin fascinated Schrader as "an undereducated, lower-middle class Midwestern psychopath [who] talked to himself in his diary just like a Sorbonne drop-out in a Bresson film."¹²⁷ It is also for this reason that Schrader was criticized for writing Travis as "an inarticulate person to express my articulate notions."¹²⁸ Were Travis to have no consciousness of the existential nature of his crisis, his anxiety would be minimal, yet, much as the Underground man sees consciousness as a disease, "the more the consciousness, the more intense the despair."¹²⁹ This extreme despair requires transcendence, yet he lacks the awareness to obtain it. In a sense, it is like Quebecoise author Ying Chen's answer to Camus's only serious philosophical question: "Life is not worth living, but only the most intelligent and

¹²⁶ Yalom, 373 – Yalom references most notably Martin Buber's 'I-Thou' relationship, along with Maslow and Fromm.

¹²⁷ Taubin, 17. Though the script was written before the diary was published (though according to Taubin, part of the diary were leaked in the news), Schrader did read the diary and was "tempted to take some of the good stuff from it and add it to *Taxi Driver*," but did not, citing legal reasons. (Thompson, 11). Whether from the news reports, or inadvertently during revision, it seems quite improbable that the diary did not have a direct influence on the final version of *Taxi Driver*.

¹²⁸ Bliss (2000), 8. In regards to Sartre's influence, Schrader would reread *La Nausée* before writing *Taxi Driver*.

¹²⁹ Kierkegaard, also referenced in Yalom, 380.

most stupid continue to live it.”¹³⁰ Travis, being neither, spirals inexorably to suicide.

The reality is that alienation is not only inherent to existence but, as Wolfe’s statement suggests, inescapable and permanent. Fritz Heinemann makes a similar assertion, directly referring to alienation as something which impossible to eliminate, but instead something which can only be endured.¹³¹ The subsequent question becomes how the individual copes with this isolation – and that is specifically through interpersonal relationships, as Yalom notes “existential isolation and interpersonal isolation are intricately interwoven,” but that “no relationship can eliminate isolation” but “assuage[s] fundamental and universal isolation.”¹³² In Schrader’s terms, or rather Schrader’s interpretation and adoption of Bresson’s terms, transcendence is also achieved through the other. While in many of their films, this transcendence takes place on a religious level, Schrader’s *American Gigolo* and *Light Sleeper* bring this to a secular level, mimicking the ending of Bresson’s *Pickpocket*. Schrader asserts that although *Pickpocket* is not overtly religious, as with Bresson’s other films, “there is transcendental style, and the decisive action is the ‘miraculous’ element within it.”¹³³ Schrader evokes a similar connection between the secular and the spiritual while discussing *American Gigolo*; he states:

It’s the acceptance of unconditional goodness, which is the same as spiritual grace. You accept the idea that Christ died for you and you did nothing to deserve this; it’s a gift and you just have to be open enough to accept it in order to become whole. When it’s the case of someone offering their love, you just have to swallow your ego and accept the fact that someone loves you even though you don’t deserve their love.¹³⁴

Transcendence is, to Schrader, a miraculous form of grace, whether religious or secular, is based on accepting the love of another, specifically the

¹³⁰ Spoken by one of the characters in Chen, Y. *L’Ingratitude Babel*, Montreal, 1995 p. 87

¹³¹ Heinemann, 256

¹³² Yalom, 362-3.

¹³³ Schrader (1972), 80

¹³⁴ Schrader (1990), 166

‘Wholly Other,’ a term which is inherently vague, but connotes a feeling of the Transcendent/Holy/Ideal.¹³⁵ In the case of *Pickpocket*, this ‘Wholly Other,’ is manifested in Michel’s sudden decision to love Jeanne, the “miraculous’ event: the expression of love by an unfeeling man with in an unfeeling environment.”¹³⁶ However, in Travis’s case there is no ‘Wholly Other,’ at least not one which Travis is willing to accept. To the contrary, ‘acceptance’ of the other is quite the opposite of Travis’s mission, as he seeks to impose his values on his environment; and ‘swallowing his ego’ seems an anathema to him, whether in confronting and blaming Betsy after his rejection, or in his overt hostility to Iris’s choices, whether her remaining with Sport or leaving for the Vermont commune.¹³⁷

Travis’s declaration of his desire to “become a person like other people” again returns to the issue of space. Travis confines himself to his apartment, all while bemoaning his immobility – his solipsism is, in part, the cause of the very isolation he suffers. Even though his taxi goes all over New York, he never leaves it, and before the start of the film, Travis mentions ‘riding around’ as a means of assuaging his insomnia. In both situations, despite his constant movement, Travis has no true destination and instead only confines himself further to the driver’s seat. In comparing of films of Scorsese, Haenni notes “‘doing things’ and ‘going places’ are closely intertwined: the latter presumes the former (one can go places only if one has a certain amount of agency),” suggesting not only the link between space and action, but also underscores their lack of agency, and more importantly,

¹³⁵ Schrader (1972), 5 Schrader places Jeanne and her love for Michel, as a confrontation with the ‘Wholly Other.’ – Jeanne’s character subsequently corresponds to Michelle in *American Gigolo* and Anne in *Light Sleeper*.

¹³⁶ Schrader (1972), 81

¹³⁷ While the idea of a child prostitute being ‘content’ with her life choices appears preposterous, a number of scholars and critics, including Rice (120) and Ebert (273), have suggested this, citing the scene of Iris and Sport together and the role the end of *The Searchers* had on *Taxi Driver* (which is why Wood refers to the scene as ‘The Scar Scene,’ where Scar is Debbie’s abductor/husband and the main antagonist of the film). This may also be why Schrader had to return to the scene at the end of *Hardcore* – so that Van Dorn can offer his daughter the choice that Travis denied Iris. As to Vermont, Travis gives her money for ‘her trip,’ although to where, whether her parent’s or Vermont, is unspecified. Nonetheless, Iris is ultimately returned to her parents, whether in reality or in Travis’s fantasies.

their social isolation. Haenni asserts that this “doing things’ and ‘going places’ has... more to do with the ability to participate in society *tout court*.”¹³⁸

We have previously seen how Travis’s room and taxi manifest his alienation spatially; yet there is another way in which Travis’s alienation is tied into space. Travis is ultimately alienated *from* space. With the meager and dissatisfactory exceptions of his prison-like room, ghostly driver’s seat, and constantly threatened diner, Travis does not truly have ‘his own space.’ This connection between the individual and his space is just as important to being as the connection between individuals. As Yalom states:

We are surrounded, ‘at home in’ a stable world of familiar objects and institutions, a world in which all objects and beings are connected and interconnected many times over. We are lulled into a sense of cozy, familiar belongingness; the primordial world of vast emptiness and isolation is buried and silenced, only to speak in brief bursts during nightmares and mythic visions.¹³⁹

It is precisely from this familiar world which Travis has been uprooted; both in moving to New York, and more importantly what he perceives as an invasion of ‘the filth’ (while never directly specified, it is assumed from his writing to his family that he is not a native New Yorker). It is precisely this loss of space which leads Travis to a more existential ‘*déracinement*,’ parallel to Heidegger’s uncanny in which “one loses one’s sense of familiarity with the world.” The opposite, in which “one (dasein) is totally involved in the familiar world of appearance and has lost contact with one’s existential situation,” is the ‘everyday.’¹⁴⁰ There is an irony inherent in the similar vocabulary used by Heidegger and Schrader, but it is not without use: For Heidegger, the impossibility of a continuous ‘everyday’ provokes anxiety, and subsequently the freedom to create; for Schrader, the anxiety of the everyday creates a disparity which

¹³⁸ Haenni, 74. Travis’s (self-imposed) lack of agency. In a sense, Travis’s violent explosion is the release of a pent up need to act, to become the “True Force,” he fantasizes of becoming. It may also be for this reason that Travis opts to assassinate Palantine.

¹³⁹ Yalom, 358

¹⁴⁰ Yalom, 359

necessitates spiritual transcendence. To this extent, anxiety, or defamiliarization, represents the possibility of ego development. This alienation also poses a great risk, however, both philosophically and psychologically. As Fritz Heinemann states “Normal alienation is healthy, abnormal alienation is a disease. Alienation is dominating. Alienation interrupts any creative activity and destroys normal relationships, turning into trust into distrust.”¹⁴¹ Yalom similarly points to alienation as a source of many psychopathologies. To the extent that interpersonal relationships assuage the anxiety of isolation and prevent it from becoming pathological, so too does the familiar, the everyday. Travis has neither; isolating himself in his room while dreaming of ‘going somewhere.’ This defamiliarization poses itself linguistically – whether a product of regional differences, conservative upbringing or time spent away in Vietnam, Travis frequently runs into words with which he is unfamiliar, most notably ‘moonlighting,’ as he applies for a job, and ‘how’s it hanging,’ while speaking with the other drivers in the diner.

The only solution is to either change one’s environment to fit his ‘home,’ as Travis attempts (and fails), or to adapt to the changing environment, as it would appear Wizard has done. Indeed, his words of consolation to Travis sound as a sort of rudimentary, inarticulate stoicism. While this ‘white restoration’ would not normally fit under the context of ‘alienation,’ to the racist, homophobic Travis “all of these male characters fantasize about a stable urban space in which they own and control an allotted part of space... Such a heterosexual space that guarantees their kingdom is the prerequisite for character growth and development.”¹⁴² There is an important distinction to be made, however – what is necessary to the character’s growth and development is a space of their own, a ‘Heimlich,’ or ‘rooted’ space. The white heterosexual element is superimposed on this necessity by the subject, namely Travis. This is part of why Travis perceived need to ‘cleanse’ his living area, whereas his peers are far more adaptive to the changing environment.

¹⁴¹ 하이네만, 256-7(정상적 소외는 건전하고, 비정상적 소외는 병적이다. 소외가 지배적이면 소외는 곧 창조적 활동의 방해가 되고 정상적 관계를 파괴하고 신뢰를 불신으로 바꿔 놓는다).

¹⁴² Haenni, 70

2.3.2 The Question of Transcendence: Partly Fact and Partly Fiction – A Walking Contradiction

The remaining question is ‘does Travis succeed in finding any form of transcendence in *Taxi Driver*?’ Has Travis encountered any sort of spiritual awakening by the end of the film? It would seem that this is determined first and foremost by how the ending of the film is interpreted. The ending is here defined as both the shootout at the brothel its aftermath. However, for simplicity’s sake, we will refer to the shootout as ‘the end’ and the events after Travis’s awakening in the hospital as the epilogue. This break is also important in the context of transcendence because, if Travis’s transcendence is to be believed, then this divide represents a decisive action and the subsequent ‘status,’ or having returned to the world with a certain degree of unity with the Transcendent.

It is perhaps most useful by first addressing the distinct contrast between the endings of *Taxi Driver*, *American Gigolo*, and *Light Sleeper* – namely there is no apparent meeting with the ‘Wholly Other’ in *Taxi Driver* whereas the latter two have the acceptance of a Christ-like savior, manifested in the love of a woman; *Light Sleeper*’s ending more subdued than *American Gigolo*, which carries no pretense of subtlety. While these two films, following *Pickpocket*, achieve spiritual transcendence through the ‘miraculous’ love of a woman, transcendence does not necessitate a romantic relationship; the Transcendent also be religious or spiritual, concerning God or Nature. In this lens, Travis’s rejection of Betsy is instead the product of a spiritual transformation. As Rice suggest, much as Travis’s “sexual deprivation is a metaphor for a spiritual deprivation in modern life,” he no longer seeks Betsy’s affection because “he has already experienced a form of excitement and *renewal*... more complete than sex.”¹⁴³ The renewal element of this statement is the most important, as it is what separates transcendence from simple catharsis – the renewed person continues their existence in which the imminent and the spiritual are “perpetually locked in conflict, but they are paradoxically one and the same.”¹⁴⁴ In the case of *Taxi Driver*, it is “the

¹⁴³ Rice, 120; 122 Emphasis added.

¹⁴⁴ Schrader (1972), 49. Here Schrader refers to ‘man and nature’ in Ozu’s works. The immanent and spiritual are also referred to ‘the spiritual and the physical’ in the context of Bresson at 83.

destruction of the limiting ego-consciousness, or alienation (“the body of this death”), and a release into a larger, psychologically integrated existence” through martyrdom.¹⁴⁵ Blake arrives at a similar conclusion, viewing Travis’s violent slaughter as a bloody sacrament where he “[finds] a kind of redemption for another and himself by the violent shedding of blood.”¹⁴⁶ This connection becomes even more apparent in the words of Schrader, who links redemption and transcendence.¹⁴⁷

However, while many critics have commented on Travis’s indifference towards Betsy, Travis’s potential transcendence is hinted in the epilogue through his interactions with his colleagues. As Wizard tells one of his characteristic anecdotes, Travis seems involved in and part of the group. Unlike the scenes in the diner, Travis is not seen walking into the group’s conversation but is present when the scene opens - the newcomer is instead Charlie T. Travis has ultimately developed a sense of belong and connection to the other drivers, as well as the ability to communicate fluidly. Moreover the group is outside, no longer confined to the threatened space of the diner. While still night, the red tint is no longer present, nor are the prostitutes or other people who Travis would deem ‘the scum.’ The precise location is different, as they are in front of the St. Regis Hotel rather than outside a diner, but this St. Regis Hotel is only a few blocks from the ‘Hell’¹⁴⁸ of Times Square. The key point, however, is that Travis has either found or reclaimed a space for ‘the people,’ just as he has restored Iris to her family, and thus re-established the traditional family and saved the ‘pure’ girl from corruption.

The religious and transcendental nature of this transformation is present not only in the ending, but subtly alluded to throughout the film – the end is merely the culmination. The most iconic sequence is that of Travis’s beginning preparations in which Travis holds his arm over the open flame of his gas stove.

¹⁴⁵ Rice, 113 Rice is referring to the Western tradition of bloody martyrdom in general; though

¹⁴⁶ Blake, 6

¹⁴⁷ Thompson, 10. “What I’m concerned about in films and in real life is redemption, because I do believe in purging and a kind of transcendence, either through contemplation or action. In *Taxi Driver* and *Yakuza*, it’s a redemption through action, self-destructive action. In the films I wrote about in the Bresson-Dreyer-Ozu book, it was through ritual purification – more conventional church rituals.”

¹⁴⁸ Ebert, 43. “Scorsese: ... how many times can you use 42nd Street as a metaphor for hell? But that’s the thing about hell – it goes on and on.”

Bliss contrasts this quite convincingly with Charlie holding his hand over candles in *Mean Streets*. While we have briefly analyzed the ascetic element of this sequence in section I.B of this chapter, there is a critical connection between this asceticism and religious transcendence. For Charlie, the flames are those of damnation, but Travis “conceives of fire not as the stuff of damnation but as a purifier... he holds his fist in a flame to steel himself from the pain of his mission, and burns Betsy’s flowers to free himself from emotional attachments.”¹⁴⁹ This physical and emotional numbing would appear antithetical to transcendence, as transcendence connotes an outpouring of emotion – the experience of the Transcendent – yet Travis is still in his preparatory stage, one of disparity in which “suggests the need, but not the place, for emotions,” and in which “the very detachment of emotion... intensifies the potential emotional experience.”¹⁵⁰ This also accounts for the stylistic break during the shootout, the “decisive actions [that] will allow him to transcend the city’s Hell.”¹⁵¹ Travis training himself is essentially an emotional draining preparing him, literally and spiritually, for a decisive action meant to transcend his alienated existence.

The idea that transcendence, or even redemption, can be achieved through violent slaughter is controversial to say the least, although there is the very strong possibility that Travis did not truly achieve any sort of transcendence. Even Travis’s sudden connection to his coworkers or establishment of a social space does not inherently connote transcendence; much as Yalom and Heidegger suggest, this connection may not be the product of a resolution of the anxiety of alienation or transcendence of disparity, but rather latching on to the quotidian to assuage the anxiety - the moment the support is gone, the anxiety reemerges. Although this last point would seem to make the epilogue quite out of place and arbitrary, it is not impossible in the context of the film. Schrader also makes this assertion, noting that while Travis seeks some sort of transcendence, it is an unfulfilling one. He states “...the gun is empty and he can’t kill himself. But, in time, the cycle will again come around and he’ll succeed the next time. The redemption

¹⁴⁹ Bliss (1995), 51

¹⁵⁰ Schrader (1972), 78 Schrader proceeds to quote Bresson, stating “Emotion cannot be projected without order and restraint,” citing Blue, J., *Excerpts from an Interview with Robert Bresson June, 1965* by the author, 1969, Los Angeles, p. 4.

¹⁵¹ Bliss (1995), 51 Bliss is clearly intentionally using Schrader’s language.

or elevation or transcendence he seeks is that of an adolescent – he’s simply striking out.”¹⁵² Rubi suggests the same cyclical nature of the film, pointing to the nearly identical opening and closing sequences of New York traffic, including the ‘chemtone’ technique.¹⁵³

The third and most convincing alternative is that the epilogue is to be taken as Travis’s dying fantasy, one in which he is connected to his ideal society and no longer needs Betsy’s attention. This approach would also explain the inconsistencies between Travis’s apparent reintegration into society, the similarity of the opening sequence during the credits and Travis’s sudden anxiety.¹⁵⁴ The idea that the epilogue is fantasy does not have particular ramifications on the question of transcendence, but Travis’s suicide would. Martyrdom presupposes a cause for which to be martyred, death itself is coincidental. Suicide, on the other hand, is the specific rejection of life and it is clear that death is Travis’s primary goal, as evidence by his mock shooting of himself. Though not as explicit as during the ending sequence, Travis makes a similar gesture while watching *American Bandstand*; seeing an African American couple dancing on the screen, he points his .44 at the image. After doing so, he poses the gun against his temple. It is not angled perpendicularly as in a suicide, yet the foreshadowing is apparent. Moreover, the romantic music of the television fills the screen and slightly spills over into the next scene, such that whether coming from the television or superimposed on the scene (and Travis’s thoughts) is ambiguous. His idealized romantic fantasies are inextricably and directly tied to his suicidal impulses.

Among Travis’s inconsistencies is the violent shootout itself. Even if Travis’s reason for attacking Sport is to ‘save’ Iris and, symbolically, reestablish the conservative social space, his attempt to assassinate Palantine would appear to negate this as a prime motivator – Travis’s becoming a hero rather than a villain is the product of chance, but then saving Iris and removing of ‘the scum’ is equally the product of chance. The primary drive is instead violence, and, more concretely,

¹⁵² Thompson, 14

¹⁵³ Rubi, 51 Schrader would later reveal the cyclical nature of the film was largely the product of Scorsese (*Scene by Scene*).

¹⁵⁴ The brief moment is inherently ambiguous, but could be Travis’s recognition of his imminent demise (it is Travis’s last appearance on screen, save on brief flash through in the rearview mirror during the cityscape collage serving as background to the credits) or possibly the recognition that his rampage, though cathartic, will fail to change truly change the city.

suicidal violence. It would appear that Travis was incapable of resolving his contradictions and his loneliness, his “Puritanism and pornography at the same time; ‘I’ve got to get healthy’ while popping pills at the same time,”¹⁵⁵ which became exacerbated to the point of suicide. The alienation Travis faces is nonetheless resolvable, but necessitates the resolution of his many opposed impulses, especially to the extent that Travis’s loneliness is the self-imposed product of these contradictions.

If Travis has not achieved any form of transcendence, what is there to suggest that transcendence, or even the assuaging of alienation is possible? The possibility is perhaps best manifested, though not without ambiguity, in Wizard’s character. The other taxi drivers are naturally in a very similar social economic situation as Travis, yet do not appear to experience the same feelings of loneliness and alienation that he does, suggesting the crisis is personal rather than socially induced. As Lubin appropriately suggests “if Travis were content or able to relate with the other cabbies then his perspective of urban decay would appear less disturbing.”¹⁵⁶ If the space of *Taxi Driver* is formed by Travis’s mental state and alienation, the alleviation of his loneliness would make his revolution by the city far more tolerable.¹⁵⁷ The changing environment of New York and the *déracinement* he experiences are individual as well. Wizard appears to adapt quite well to his changing environment and, despite referring to Harlem as “Mau Mau Land,” does not seem particularly bothered by the seediness of the environment and is far more accepting of the changing demographics, including an acceptance of homosexuals, quite rare for the time. Nor would Travis’s malaise appear resultant from regional differences, given Doughboy’s (unambiguously a Southerner) successful adaptation to society.¹⁵⁸

The extent to which Travis has been able to overcome his existential crisis is largely dependent on the interpretation of the ending. Travis may have,

¹⁵⁵ Kouvaros, 19 citing Bouzereau, L. *Making Taxi Driver* on *Taxi Driver* Columbia Pictures, 1999.

¹⁵⁶ Lubin, 19

¹⁵⁷ Even in psychology, the presence of social support leads to negative experiences being perceived less negatively, and alternately, its absence leads to negative experiences being more negative, often leading to depression (권석만, 67).

¹⁵⁸ Kael refers to Doughboy as “another kind of rootlessness.” This ‘rootlessness’ serves as a foil to Travis’s *déracinement*, yet Doughboy’s is far more balanced and well adapted, (Kael, 528).

through violence, found a sense of redemption and catharsis sufficient to re-root himself into society. This violent outburst may instead have a temporary alleviation, a rampage no more healing than his seeking relief in pornography.¹⁵⁹ Whether or not Travis has actually achieved a sort of transcendence after his violent outburst, the far more salient point is that it exists in an individualized universe of agency, one in which the possibility of transcendence and the overcoming of alienation exist.

¹⁵⁹ Both Kael and Taubin suggest that the rampage is essentially pornographic for Travis. "When Travis gets out of his cab to begin his 'rescue' mission it's as if he's walking into one of the porn movies he watches obsessively when he can't sleep," (Taubin, 19). "the absence of sex- bottled-up, impacted energy and emotion, with a blood-spattering release... given his ascetic loneliness, it's the only real orgasm he can have." (Kael, 529)

Chapter 3. Town Series

In our analysis of Paul Schrader's films it was our goal to connect psychological loneliness and isolation to the philosophical concept of alienation. This was a completely subjective, individual experience. With Jeon Kyu-hwan's works, however, we shall endeavor to connect the individual experience of alienation to the overall social phenomena which underpin it. Through the analysis of *Taxi Driver's* genre and sociopolitical background we have touched upon the social component of alienation. In Jeon Kyu-hwan's films this social component is far more prevalent and more importantly, while Schrader's works hinted at the individual's sense of alienation as a reaction to changing social phenomena, Jeon Kyu-hwan's works assert that these very phenomena instead directly *cause* the experience of alienation. It is ultimately a far more Marxist interpretation of alienation. The simplest means of distinguishing the two is directors is that, while Schrader deals with a personal evolution surrounding an existential sense of alienation, Jeon Kyu-hwan focuses on a sense of alienation produced by the social structure and how it effects a variety of groups.

In the case of Jeon Kyu-hwan it is far more difficult to select only one of his films. This is especially true of the Town series; Jeon Kyu-hwan's other films, *From Seoul to Varanasi* and especially *The Weight*, though retaining many of the director's thematic idiosyncrasies, depart greatly from the cinematic style of the Town Series. Also, as a very new and relatively obscure director, there is a pronounced lack of scholarship on his films – very few scholars have treated The Town Series as a whole, and any extensive analysis has largely been reserved for *Dance Town* (and even the vast majority of scholarship on *Dance Town* is focused predominantly on the portrayal of North Korean refugees). With the exception of Kim Yi-seok's in depth analysis of the series, there is next to no prior work on *Mozart Town*. It is also valuable to look at the Town Series as a whole because, unlike Schrader's films 'Man in the Room,' which span four decades, the Town Series was filmed over three years. As a result, the Town Series often has much more unity of themes and structure. This is not to suggest that the films are interchangeable, as there is a large degree of nuance between themes in each film.

Moreover, while the same themes and techniques remain consistent through the series, certain elements are far more salient in certain films more than others. Critics also note the frequent use of the same actors as more than a simple collaboration, but suggestive of an interconnectivity between works. In a sort of self-allusion, the actors reprise similar roles in different characters. The necessary nuance is that Jeon Kyu-hwan manages this while maintaining each characters individuality despite the audience being deliberately forbade from associating with their experiences too much; these are not merely fungible stock characters meant to exemplify a particular social group.

Subsequently, we will be focusing predominantly on *Mozart Town*; however, it will be necessary to draw from *Animal Town* and *Dance Town*. In addition to the reasons mentioned above, there is also a thematic transition from isolation and neglect in *Mozart Town* to social control and surveillance in the latter two. Similarly, while all three films center around social isolation in the urban space, *Dance Town* shifts the character's reaction from melancholy, as in the first to films, to disgust. These progressions are in no small part resultant from the specific situation of each social group; however, as we shall see, the underlying mechanisms are the same.

3.1 Lost in the City

When talking about any sort of alienated social group, there is the danger of reducing the individual to their group status. There is also the subsequent danger of asserting individuality when the individual is part of a group, actively or passively, willingly or unwillingly, by the sole fact of their social attributes. Simone de Beauvoir perhaps best explains the paradox, claiming:

Repudiating the ideas of the eternal feminine, black spirit, or Jewish character is not denying that there are Jews, Blacks, and women today: such a denial presents the concerned parties not with a liberation,

but an inauthentic escape. It is clear that a woman cannot in good faith situate herself outside of her sex.¹⁶⁰

Although de Beauvoir is referring specifically to women, it is clear that she considers ethnicity and religion to be in similar situations – one in which one cannot truly escape the social group into which one is placed. This is true both psychologically, reinforcement development theory, and socially, in the very real sense that one will inevitably be judged depending on the group to which the individual is assigned.¹⁶¹ This is quite apparent in the films of Jeon Kyu-hwan, most notably the immigrant workers of *Mozart Town* and the disabled in *Dance Town* and *The Weight*.

Both de Beauvoir and Aquin's analysis are, however, insufficient for explaining the totality of social alienation, as the groups listed above, with perhaps the exception of religious minorities,¹⁶² are generally identifiable by

¹⁶⁰ de Beauvoir (1949), 15 (Refuser les notions d'éternel féminin, d'âme noire, de caractère juif, ce n'est pas nier qu'il y ait aujourd'hui des Juifs, des Noirs, des femmes : cette négation ne représente pas pour les intéressés une libération, mais une fuite inauthentique. Il est clair qu'aucune femme ne peut prétendre sans mauvaise foi se situer par-delà son sexe.)

¹⁶¹ "The act of domination (which corresponds to the position of the stronger and more numerous) ends up irritate they who accomplishes it, and forces them to multiply their dubious proclamations, which reveals that, having in reality a bad conscience, they do all in their power to camouflage their domination. The majority, oftentimes weary, comes to accuse the minority of counter-dominating them by obdurately impeding them and holding them back, which comes to pass in reality. The minority, accused of being a dead weight, assumes more and more painfully this sordid role." (« L'acte de dominer (qui correspond à la position du plus nombreux et du plus fort) finit par gêner celui qui l'accomplit, et le pousse à multiplier les équivoques, ce qui revient à dire que, par mauvaise conscience réelle, il fait tout en son pouvoir pour camoufler la relation de domination. Le majoritaire, parfois excédé, en arrive à accuser le minoritaire de le contre-dominer par la fonction de freinage et d'entrave qu'il finit par exercer de fait. Le minoritaire, ainsi accuse d'être un mort, assume de plus en plus doulement ce mauvais rôle. ») Aquin (91). Aquin differentiates these as 'cultural-linguistic groups', arguing that there are very few true 'ethnicities' left (81-82). While this may hold for much of Western society, in Korea, and in Jeon Kyu-hwan's films, race is quite apparent. Even though all non-ethnic Koreans in Jeon Kyu-hwan's films speak Korean (with the exception of one bit-role in *The Weight* and *Mozart Town* each), physical ethnic attributes remain one of the main factors in social alienation. Though Aquin's methods of distinction are not particularly applicable, his analysis of the effects, inspired largely by Aime Caesar and Albert Memmi, nonetheless hold.

¹⁶² Religion is far less contentious in contemporary Korean society than modern western society as Korean society is far more religiously diverse, Christians, Buddhists, and Atheists representing approximately a third of the population each. There are a number of minority religions, among these an increasing Muslim population which is largely ignored in both society and media. *From Seoul to Varanasi* does address Islam, and in particular Islamic extremism; however, although alienation does play a role in *From Seoul to Varanasi*, the connection of alienation to Islam is both quite tenuous and,

external, physical characteristics. Sexual minorities, such as the transsexual of *The Weight*, the pedophile of *Animal Town*,¹⁶³ are not readily apparent; and even more significant is the socio-economic status of individual characters. This is especially apparent in the case of *Mozart Town*, where the majority of characters are in the lowest socio-economic class, whether by virtue of their actual level of income, as with the migrant workers, or the low status with which their occupation is regarded, from the stall worker to the attendant and the enforcer of a room salon.

3.1.1 A Woman and Her Room

This alienation extends itself to the city as well, whether symbolically or literally, and ultimately this spatialization takes two forms. The first, which parallels Paul Schrader's films, is the insertion of an alienated space. However, unlike Schrader, the multiplicity of the characters and the hyperrealist cinematic techniques suggest that alienation is far less individual and far more widespread, produced by the social system itself. Alienation, while experienced by the individual, is not a personal phenomenon in Jeon Kyu-hwan's works (though, as we shall see, there are instances of personal, individualized alienation), but rather an 'alienated class' created as a byproduct of the social system. This difference also translates itself into the representation of space in the two filmmakers' works - for *Taxi Driver*'s Travis's room is *his* own personal space of alienation; in the Town Series, most of the characters are shown to have similar spaces of alienation. The title of this section is subsequently deliberately, and slightly deceptively, an allusion to Schrader's works; however, though a number of parallels exist there are also a number of significant contrasts which represent a

frankly, most likely the film's weakest and least convincing point. Christianity does play a significant role in North Korean refugee Jung-lim's alienation *Dance Town* as a church group represents one of Jung-lim's many failed attempts to integrate into South Korean society.

¹⁶³ Referring to a pedophile as a sexual minority is somewhat contentious, as pedophilia is not considered a gender or sexual orientation but a paraphilia, and the controversial nature is further exacerbated by the social implication – however our mention of the character here is meant solely to denote a sense of alienation based on both the character's past sexual misdeeds and continuous deviant desire in the film.

similar method used to explain a same phenomenon, yet to a completely different philosophical conclusion.

One prime example of this is the convenience stall in which Ji-won works. Kim Yi-seok best explain the phenomenon here:

Her hobby is taking photographs of the street she can see from her stall; the camera in her hands represents a yearning to head toward the wide world beyond the edges of her stall, and at the same time it is an expression of her will to expand her personal space beyond her stall. However, her camera can only face the single direction in front of her, and so even the attempt to expand her person space itself comes with limitations.¹⁶⁴

While, as a public space, this may be more analogous to Travis's taxi, Ji-won's stall is more analogous to Travis's room – the first, while there is a scene which takes place in Ji-won's home, the overwhelming majority of her time on camera is spent in her stall. In addition to simple time on screen, she is also seen engaging in far more mundane acts, such as eating, brushing her teeth, or preparing for her date, in her stall, rather than at home. Moreover, Swensen's use of Donald's *Imagining the Modern City* to describe Travis's room¹⁶⁵ is equally applicable to Ji-won's stall, far more so than to her own apartment. Much like Travis's room, Ji-won's stall is extremely cluttered, her selves littered with extra stock and items such as a television and coffee mix to make her long stretches in the stall more manageable. The photographs she has taken hang over her head from string strewn above her head. However, there are a number of differences, the most significant being that, while both rooms are small and filled with clutter,

¹⁶⁴ 김이석 (2011), 122-3 (그녀의 취미는 가판대에서 보이는 거리를 촬영하는 것인데, 그녀의 손에 들린 카메라는 가판대 너머의 넓은 세상을 향한 동경의 표시이며, 자신의 공간을 가판대 칸막이 너머로 확장시키려는 의지의 표현이기도 하다. 하지만 그녀의 카메라는 가판대 건너편이라는 하나의 방향에 고정될 수밖에 없기에 자신의 공간을 확장시키려는 그녀의 시도는 한계에 부딪힐 수밖에 없다)

¹⁶⁵ Which he refers to as "a psychological and spiritual space, a projection of mental space onto setting." See Chapter III, note 26.

Ji-won's stall is, perfectly opposite Travis's apartment, organized. Ji-won is able to manage her tiny space, yet unable to escape it. If her space is considered a projection of mental space, it is not the anxious, manic space of Travis's apartment, but a place of suffocation. The other, and most important factor, is directional; Travis uses his room to shut himself *in*; the convenience stall represents the impossibility of Ji-won's getting *out*. It is also in this aspect that Travis's apartment and Ji-won's stall both share the quality of a prison; however, while Travis's imprisonment is self-imposed (or, as Weinreich suggests, a prison of his thoughts),¹⁶⁶ Ji-won's prison is far more, like real prisons, the imposition of confinement, and like a prison window, the front of her stall allows her to look out upon a world in which she cannot truly participate. This is even further exacerbated by the continually open doors on both sides of the stall. Each of these openings suggests the promise of mobility, yet Ji-won is ultimately confined inside, unable to move even her feet, with the sole exception of restocking the shelves or sweeping the surrounding area.

The spatialization of her social confinement is produced not only by the claustrophobic nature of the stall itself, but also through the juxtaposition with its surroundings. The first time the audience is introduced to the stall and its environment, the camera quickly turns to Ji-won in a mid-shot, and the large main streets going through Seoul are quite prominent. While there are tall buildings in the background, the overall feeling of expanse is horizontal. The same is true in the next sequence in which Ji-won looks out the front of her stall at the passerby, a city park on her right. However, in the next 'stall sequence,' in which Ji-won is opening for work in the early morning before dawn, the camera angle is shifted such that a nearby building dwarfs the stall, and the expanse switches from horizontal to vertical, though the continued presence of the intersection continues the denoted horizontal expanse. The juxtaposition of these two grandeurs further isolates and minimizes the stall situated in their nexus. It is here that there is a nuance to the use of space here is slightly different than *Taxi Driver*. Travis sees the urban space as having become alien and hostile and one – in *Taxi Driver*, the city is a character and that character is a monster. However, in *Mozart*

¹⁶⁶ See note 91

Town the city is completely apathetic; a giant sprawling body that serves to accentuate the insignificance and alienation of the characters. In the same vein, contrary to the extremely subjective camera of *Taxi Driver*, bird's eye view shots are quite commonplace in Jeon Kyu-hwan's films. Whether Duc-sang's bus traveling through traffic, the view of the rotary in Varanasi in *From Seoul to Varanasi* or, to a lesser degree, the long shot of down an intersection after Seong-chul's death, the roads offer a line of seemingly infinite depth. These shots not only serve, as they do with Ji-won's stall, to underscore the insignificance of the characters but also the vibrant traffic in which no individuals are visible portrays the city as an expansive, inhuman machine.



[Fig. 7] Horizontal depth evoked by roadway.



[Fig. 8] Vertical depth by juxtaposition with office

This phenomenon is further emphasized by the structure of film. The film has a plethora of characters that appear on-screen and the camera does strongly favor any one over the other and many of whose lives do not intersect. (This formula was far less prominent in *Animal Town* and *Dance Town*, both of which have two clear main characters; there are, however, a number of prominent minor characters in the latter). Along with its constantly revolving characters, *Mozart Town* seems without plot – the film is composed, much like the machine of the social system, able to afford only minimal amount of care to each of its characters. This message can be undermined by the interconnectivity of the characters, especially when they appear serendipitously in the same frame. Although this may be indicative of a sort of 'underclass unity' in which each of the characters are, though not in collaboration, in a similar situation. Nonetheless, this aspect contrasts the overall hyperrealist style of the film.

3.1.2 Monsters in the City

The city does not represent solely passively induced isolation, but also the active suppression of those whose existence threatens the social order. Oftentimes, these threats come from the very individuals who were passively alienated, their inability to adapt to society transforming itself into resentment. In some other instances it is a self-fulfilling prophecy, in which the perceived threat to society truly becomes one by virtue of the social paranoia. As Kim Ji-mi explains “fear only controls and strengthens prejudice, rather than allowing the situation to be seen more objectively. Rashly attempting to remove the source of the fear instead can instead easily result in a more violent situation.”¹⁶⁷

This phenomenon is not readily apparent in *Mozart Town*, in part because, unlike Seong-chul or Jung-lim, none of the characters are under constant scrutiny (the opposite is true) and none of them are truly considered threats to society. Even Il-hwan, who is a criminal, does not pose a true threat because his place is already incorporated into the social system. As long as his activities do not branch out into larger society, he does not pose any true threat to the social system. In other words, as long as Il-hwan remains in his alienated space even his violent behavior is permitted, especially as this violence is directed at other criminals, namely those trying to extort the room salon or the Laundromat owner who, in addition to hiring and abusing illegal labor, occupies an alienated economic status. While Il-hwan is seen acting in society at large, it is never in the capacity of his work. These characters are in a sense ‘ghosts’ living in society;¹⁶⁸ as long as they remain invisible, like Travis in his metal coffin, no one will pay them mind.

¹⁶⁷ 김지미, 419 (공포는 통제와 편견을 강화할 뿐 상황을 더 객관적으로 보게 만들지는 않기 때문이다. 선부르게 공포의 원인을 제거하려는 태도는 오히려 더 폭력적인 상황을 손쉽게 유발할 수도 있다.)

¹⁶⁸ The term ‘ghost’ is borrowed from 김이석 (2012), 17. Kim Yi-seok also employs the term ‘monsters,’ while there is undoubtedly heavy influence from Kim Yi-seok’s essay and terminology, ‘monsters in the city’ is meant to contrast with Clapp’s term ‘city as monster’ as employed in 2.1 of this essay; the latter term refers to city as a manifestation of the individual’s alienation and the former to the individuals who are perceived as monsters by the society and, in a self-fulfilling prophecy, truly become threats.

While Il-hwan's alienated position is ultimately incorporated into (and produced by) the social system in which he lives, the same cannot be said of the foreign laborer, Etoo. While not deemed a threat (and subsequently completely ignored, even while his labor is exploited), he serves as an example in which the alienation of the individual creates a threat which was not previously present. By virtue of his race and nationality, Etoo is unable to take part in the society at large. As Kim Yi-seok explains "An African-born black laborer exists but does not exist in Korean society, and is subsequently a being no different from a ghost."¹⁶⁹ He continues to suggest that in trying to sell his organs, Etoo is asserting his physical body. However, this falls slightly short of the true problem – the refusal to buy Etoo's organs suggests also that they would be unable to sell them, presumably for black market transplant. A foreign laborer on the edge of society, he represents precisely the outsider such outfits would normally target. Instead, Etoo's rejection is that any local buyer would refuse to incorporate part of a black man, much as Korean society refuses to incorporate Etoo himself. Seen in this light, Etoo's proposal appears more as an assertion of his own existence. This is not without a tragic sense of irony; Etoo's proposal tacitly seeks social approval through his physical body but simultaneously offers to destroy it. Pointing to Etoo's unassertive demeanor and naivety, Kim Yi-seok explains "in using his unfamiliar being as a tool, he is put in a situation of render himself as an 'other' to himself."¹⁷⁰ Etoo's alienation is subsequently twofold – when his offer is rejected Etoo is symbolically rejected by Korean society, yet in the very making of the offer is a form of self-alienation from his body and, by extension, his autonomy.

Existing as a ghost on the outskirts of society, it is this rejection which ultimately turns Etoo into a real threat. Denied payment from his employer, he is forced to the drastic measure of destroying his own body by selling his organs. When this fails, he turns to destroying the body of another - he is hired to kill Il-hwan on the street. The state does not completely ignore Etoo, however, as it is

¹⁶⁹ 김이석 (2012), 17(아프리카 출신의 흑인 노동자는 한국 사회에서는 존재하지만 존재하지 않는 것이나 다름없는 유령과도 같은 존재다)

¹⁷⁰ 김이석 (2012), 17 (이 낯선 생존의 도구를 수용함으로써 그는 자기 자신으로부터도 타자화되는 상황에 처하게 된다). The 'unfamiliar body' refers to Etoo's existence in Korea, using a foreign language and unfamiliar gestures.

indicated that the police routinely check the Laundromat for illegal immigrants; though the incursion of the state is easily avoidable and more on an inconvenience than either protection or surveillance.

In addition to the aforementioned ghosts, the alienated class often takes the form of a 'monster in city.' Whether or not the 'monster' is actually a threat, these characters are distinct from 'ghosts' such as Etoo and Il-hwan in that their very existence proves created not indifference, but anxiety and fear. The subsequent response is constant surveillance, that is to say control. Oftentimes, these mechanisms of social control either create or exacerbate the very problem they seek to resolve as a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy.

The two primary examples of this phenomenon are Jung-lim and Seong-chul. Although Jung-lim does not pose any real threat to society (unlike Seong-chul), both are treated nearly identically in South Korean society. Jung-lim is provided by the government with an apartment, but is under constant surveillance; Seong-chul is required to wear an electronic anklet. Both characters also receive hostile treatment from the police. Even after her initial intimidating interrogation, Jung-lim is viewed as an outsider by the police.¹⁷¹ After befriending one officer, he later rapes her. Seong-chul's apartment is also unofficially patrolled by a suspicious patrolman. Even Su-jin's surveillance (under the guise of help) further exacerbate her deterritorialization, specifically as a functionary of state power.¹⁷² As to the violence that ensues, the sole difference is that Jung-lim's ultimate act of violence is turned inward (attempted suicide) where Seong-chul's is both inward and outward (murder followed by attempted suicide).

It is important to distinguish between the 'monster' in the city within the context of the film, as well as its significance for the audience. Jung-lim exists under the scrutiny of the society around her; however the audience is aware of her sincerity and innocence from the beginning. Although treated similarly in the context of the film itself, Seong-chul is the far more interesting character as a 'monster in the city,' given that, opposite Jung-lim, his *guilt* is known from the

¹⁷¹ Sung argues that the police serve a dual role, first as a symbol of state power, but also as common citizens. (Sung, 378). The subsequent implication is that their opinion of Jung-lim is commonplace even among those uninvolved with government.

¹⁷² 오영숙 188; 195. "Deterritorialization is effecting an analogous term for the spatial alienation, or 'deracinement,' discussed previously.

onset. Regardless of his sympathetic portrayal, Seong-chul is invariably a danger, and this makes his existence unsettling, not only within the film, but for the audience as well. As Kim Ji-mi explains:

The scenery of the film and the scenery met upon leaving the theater are not very different, and so [the film] informs us quite clearly what it is we truly need to fear... *Animal Town* accurately envisions Seoul's cityscape, and, faced with the wounds that city inflicts, tells us that anyone can become a victim or a wrongdoer.¹⁷³

The significance of this statement is twofold. As mentioned above, the audience is well aware of Seong-chul's guilt, and his character is not only to be under the surveillance of the society within the film but also feared by the audience, given that the two societies are identical. As Kim Ji-mi points out, the level of realism works to evoke a sense of paranoia by identifying the real 'monsters' in the city, even at the same time as the film affirms the monster's humanity.

The second half of this statement serves as an indictment of contemporary society for creating monsters like Seong-chul. Kim Ji-mi sites in particular the gross insufficiency of Seong-chul's medical care, poverty which drives him to get water from the nearby elementary school, so much so that "[the film] evokes the feeling that living in the city is day in and day out living on a battlefield of desire."¹⁷⁴ The state also fails in its protection of the citizens *from* Seong-chul. Not only is the state inadequate in providing treatment, but also in inadequately protecting potential victims, whether in allowing Seong-chul to roam freely into an elementary school or in failing to ensure that children have

¹⁷³ 김지미, 420-1 (극장 밖을 나선 이후에 맞이하게 되는 풍경과 영화 속 풍경은 크게 다르지 않을뿐더러 우리가 진짜로 무서워해야 할 대상이 무엇인지도 정확하게 알려준다... <애니멀 타운>은 바로 그런 한국 도시의 풍경을 정확하게 짚어내며 그런 도시가 만들어낸 상처 앞에서 누구나 희생자와 가해자가 될 수 있다는 것을 이야기한다)

¹⁷⁴ 김지미 420 (도시에서 살아간다는 것은 그야말로 하루하루 욕망의 전쟁터에서 생존하는 것이란 사실을 실감하게 된다)

competent guardians.¹⁷⁵ In short, Seong-chul is to be feared and pitied, perhaps in equal measure.

It is not only children who are potentially at risk from Seong-chul but, as is evidenced by his murdering a passenger, the whole of society is at risk as well. Up until this point, Seong-chul is not shown to have any particularly explosive tendencies and it is highly unlikely that an argument over a driving mistake would escalate to manslaughter. Subsequently, the events leading up to assault may be more important than the murder itself. There are certainly indications of the squalor in which Seong-chul lives, financially and emotionally as exemplified by his lack of power and running water, sexual disorder, and social isolation.¹⁷⁶ Symbolically, however, perhaps the most poignant scene is of Seong-chul driving along in his taxi after his foreman again delayed payment for his construction work. Seong-chul is seen sweating profusely and furiously takes a gulp of water, swallows a pill with water, and then takes yet another gulp. This action is repeated directly after the murder, connecting the two occurrences symbolically. Seong-chul also swallows a pill with water just before his suicide attempt - the futility of which further underscores the medicine and water's symbolic significance. Social suffocation becomes manifested in physical suffocation.

The connection between Seong-chul's economic difficulties and violent outburst is furthered by the characterization of the woman herself – most specifically as a vapid, upper-class stereotype. As Nam Da-eun describes, “the entrance of this seemingly rich but shallow female stereotype contrasts heavily with the realism of the characters.”¹⁷⁷ She subsequently criticizes the passenger's appearance, and the subsequent fight, as being “an arbitrary device added to advance the film's goal.”¹⁷⁸ Although the woman's entrance into the film and her

¹⁷⁵ This is the case of the young girl who frequently appears in front of Seong-chul – her sole guardian is her sick grandmother, and the social worker under whom she is charged does little more than repeatedly tell her to go to school.

¹⁷⁶ It is a far too often glanced over fact that Seong-chul is not seen bonding with anyone in the film. Even his brief conversation with his mother shows their emotional distance as Seong-chul is given money and coat, and then told not to call the house.

¹⁷⁷ 남다은, 28 (부유하지만 어딘지 천박해 보이는 여자의 전형으로 지금껏 이 영화에 등장한 인물들의 사실성과는 어긋난다)

¹⁷⁸ 남다은, 28 (다분히 영화적 목적을 위해 투입된 상투적 계기다)

stereotypical image do seem at odds with Jeon Kyu-hwan's otherwise realist style, the use of the passenger's stereotypical characterization as a narrative device makes the symbolic nature of her character all the more salient. After Seong-chul misses a turn, his passenger complains. Seong-chul apologizes and offers to waive the fare and even pay for another taxi, yet this only anger the passenger further, as she complains about being late. The passenger's abrupt hostility, continually swearing and talking down to Seong-chul is rather unconvincing, but there is one line which is of particular significance. When Seong-chul defends himself by saying that her string of verbal abuses is excessive and unwarranted, she responds by asking "what are you going to do about it?" The implication is that the passenger believes that in occupying a significantly higher social status she is subsequently entitled to treat Seong-chul as she wishes, including continuous verbal abuse. Because of their class differences, not only does she maintain a far more leisurely lifestyle than Seong-chul, but she is more valuable and subsequently has more social privileges- it is the difference between the society at large and the alienated class.¹⁷⁹ This is not to say that the ensuing violence is a form of class warfare, but rather that the passenger in part represents the social alienation continually experienced by Seong-chul, and that the violent altercation is the culmination of this perpetual alienation. Otherwise put, the systematic alienation experienced by Seong-chul ultimately turns him into a tinderbox, ready to ignite and lash out at the system responsible for his creation.

The metaphor of Seong-chul as a monster and its spatial component are most apparent in his death. After the homicide of his passenger and his attempted suicide, Seong-chul dies in a car accident, colliding with a wild boar that had wandered into the city. As Kim Yi-seok argues Seong-chul's "Both Seong-chul and the boar losing their lives is not a simple accident, but the necessarily conclusion of a being who has fallen as low as can be, that is to say self-harm or

¹⁷⁹ It is in this lens that the abruptness and lack of believability of the argument, as well as the caricature-like portrayal of the passenger are counterproductive – if this interpretation is congruent with directorial intent, a more gradual escalation or more serious cause would allow the viewer to connect with the situation, and more importantly the victim, and in such recognize Seong-chul as a more viable threat.

suicide.”¹⁸⁰ Having killed his passenger, Seong-chul revealed himself to have inexorably become a monster, despite his (failed) attempts to reintegrate into society. It is not solely his violent outburst and murder which make Seong-chul inescapably a monster. Between the murder and the suicide attempt, Seong-chul finally approaches the little girl whose path he continuously crosses throughout the film. He is interrupted by Hyung-do who gets into his taxi as a passenger; but Seong-chul swallowing his medicine and walking up to the girl suggest that he was going to succumb not only to his violent urges, but his deviant sexual ones as well, if not at that moment then certainly eventually. In this light, the title *Animal Town* is in essence ironic – throughout the duration of the film the city has been infiltrated by an ‘animal’ (literally the boar and metaphorically Seong-chul), yet by the films end the animal is killed, and far from being an ‘animal town,’ it is a town that has no place for animals. It is also for this reason which Seong-chul is seen being killed a particularly crowded intersection (far more populous than anywhere else he is seen), as though his true infraction was not murder or child abuse, but attempting to enter into the middle of society. It is also for this reason that, after the accident, Seong-chul’s body is relegated to the bottom quarter of the screen, the center of frame the intersection from which the city seems to expand endlessly in depth, breadth, and vertically, similar to the framing of Ji-won’s stall. Insignificant as he may be, the monster is destroyed, and the city remains, victorious.



[Fig. 9] Seong-chul, lifeless, marginalized by the seemingly endless expanse of the city

¹⁸⁰ 김이석 (2011), 124(멧돼지와 성철 모두 목숨을 잃게 도는 것은 우연한 사고가 아니라 바닥까지 내몰린 존재가 필연적으로 도달하게 되는 최후의 결론으로서 자해 혹은 자살인 셈이다)

3.2 Social Alienation and the Impossibility of Communication

3.2.1 The Unaffected Camera and The Voyeur

We have previously discussed the alienation, literal surveillance and metaphorical control manifested in Jung-lim's room; however there another significant element to this scene which comes to light through the use of the camera. Not only is the CCTV displayed, but the camera, and therefore the audience, is put in the CCTV camera's perspective. As Kang So-hee explains

The important part here is that as the audience becomes aware that Su-jin is observing Jung-lim with a camera, the audience's perspective and Su-jin's perspective become strangely similar... Rather than seeing a film, the audience feels that they too are secretly watching Jung-lim through a camera."¹⁸¹

Subsequently, the audience 'as society' is place in the culpable position of the surveilling party; but also simultaneous implication of the audience's inability of entering Jung-lim's world. The ramifications of this are twofold. The first works in a similar manner to Seong-chul's anklet. The constant surveillance is similar to a prison, in which "in the isolation of a prison, following a tense schedule, and being endlessly surveilled, the delinquent is pacified and becomes as an automatic doll, a flesh mechanism."¹⁸² However, these characters are not literally in prison and, especially in the case of Jung-lim, not under complete surveillance (while Seong-chul's location can be tracked, there is no constant

¹⁸¹ 강소희, 144 (그런데 여기서 중요한 것은 수진이 정림을 카메라로 지켜보고 있다는 사실을 알게 되면서 관객의 시선이 수진의 시선과 묘하게 닮아간다는 점이다... 영화를 보고 이는 것이 아니라 마치 카메라를 통해 정림을 몰래 관찰하고 있는 듯한 느낌을 받는다)

¹⁸² 오생근, 85(격리수용된 감옥에서 엄격한 일과시간표에 따라 움직이고 끊임없이 감시 받는 죄수들은 자동인형처럼 메커니즘의 육체가 되어 길글여진다)

arbiter to chastise his lusts or violence). On the one hand, this renders the form of social control all the more insidious. The individual is under conspicuous control in a prison, and as a result there is also the corresponding backlash, whether from the imprisoned or the citizenry. Constant electronic surveillance gives the system the ability to exercise power while simultaneously maintaining the illusions of freedom (for the surveilled) and humanitarianism (for the society at large). This falls directly in line with Foucault's analysis of the vessels of power, from the clinic to the prison, in the Classical Era; specifically, the mechanisms of power have continued to grow since the Enlightenment and have only broadened in scope while becoming decreasingly transparent. This power is predominantly exercised such that power increases its own authority and the productivity of the bodies under its management. The situation in *Animal Town*, and to a lesser extent in *Dance Town*, is that the maximization of individual productivity is no longer necessary in a globalized and de-industrialized¹⁸³ economy. Though we will delve into this topic further in the next section, for our purposes here it is necessary to underscore that Seong-chul and Jung-lim are essentially superfluous, and therefore disposable, bodies. It is in part for this reason that their surveillance is so incomplete: their labor does not need to be maximized but instead it is only necessary that they not interfere with the social system.

The irony of course is that these are individuals whom most people would agree should be surveilled, even though some may feel an electronic bracelet is excessive. This is especially true in Seong-chul's case, who does pose a true threat to society. Unlike the society into which Jung-lim is transplanted, the audience is aware of Jung-lim's former lifestyle and anticipates that her seeking refuge is honest. However, in Seong-chul's case the threat is quite present, given both his past actions as well as his continued pedophilic desire throughout the film. Subsequently, it is quite unclear as to whether or not there even is a solution to his predicament or if one of the prime sources of his alienation – and his subsequent suicide – is inescapable. The possible answer, if one is to be had, is in the scene in which Seong-chul is speaking with his doctor. The meeting is short,

¹⁸³ Though, in the case of Korea, having industrialized so rapidly and recently, this de-industrialization is far more limited. However, in Seoul, this de-industrialization is far more apparent.

comprised only of a few short, general questions, and a written prescription.¹⁸⁴ However, more than simply short and embarrassing, they are a means by which the doctor, and by extension the social system, can check in on Seong-chul. The basic question of “have you felt sexual attraction to little girls,” with little attempt to find the root cause, is simply a means of ascertaining the risk level. If the questions are a means of surveillance, his medication is a method of control. This is indeed reflective of the current situation of psychological therapy in Korea, where both stigma (though decreasing) to psychotherapy and an overreliance on pharmacotherapy have resulted in a situation in which short consultations are the norm and psychotherapeutic counseling is not covered by insurance and prohibitively expensive. The anxiety surrounding Seong-chul is further exacerbated by the gravity of his crime and the reality that the efficacy of any treatment is still in dispute.

In direct contrast to *Taxi Driver*'s highly subjective camera placement and voice-over narrative, the *Town* series has a distinct and intentional lack of characterization, and the camera almost never offers a direct POV shot. Instead, Jeon Kyu-hwan's technique is more often characterized by a long take with a fixed camera or a handheld one. Oftentimes a scene does not cut away, even after all the dramatic action has ended. While this may be in part the product of budgetary constrictions, it is also what a number of the aforementioned scholars refer to as realist cinema (or varyingly, naturalism or hyperrealism). That is not to say that Jeon Kyu-hwan does not stray away from realism - whether in the violent acts Nam Da-eun refers to as ‘the intrusion of genre’ (장르적 침입), the coincidental connectivity of *Mozart Town* or the background music as Il-hwan is killed;¹⁸⁵ the envisioning of deceased spouses in *Animal Town* and *Dance Town*. While these inconsistencies are, for the most part, inescapable and potentially sacrifice

¹⁸⁴ Kim Ji-mi describes these questions as a ‘mere formality’ (“형식적인 질문,” 420). In both clinical literature and popular culture such sexual deviation is most often attributed to traumatic experiences in childhood, usually the patient's own suffering of sexual abuse - for instance, Nicole Kassell's *The Woodsman* (2004) and the psychoanalytical case study presented by De Masi, M., *The Paedophile and his Inner World: Theoretical and clinical considerations on the analysis of a patient* International Journal of Psychoanalysis, vol. 88, 2007.

¹⁸⁵ Although not nearly as significant a violation as the other inconsistencies here, the jump cuts used as Il-hwan confronts a drunkard harassing Ji-won are both distracting and out-of-place.

thematic consistency for plot or characterization, a detached, 'realist' camera is by far the prevailing technique and sentiment.

This cinematic technique translates into, in direct contrast with *Taxi Driver*, is the nihilistic attitude of the camera. In *Taxi Driver*, whether provoking empathy, arousal, disgust or outrage, the audience is deeply embedded in Travis's point of view, and the cinematic techniques match Travis's state of mind. However, in Jeon Kyu-hwan's films, the camera does not probe into the sentiments of the subject; the passive observation, to the point of voyeurism, does nothing to reflect the emotions of the characters and moreover does not judge them. In *Animal Town* the camera frequently shifts from Seong-chul's face to a shot of a young girl (whether an over-the-shoulder shot or from an angle that could not be Seong-chul's point of view); it is clear from this sequence that Seong-chul is both observing and lusting after her - however the camera remains completely neutral. She is neither eroticized nor aestheticized through lighting, motion, music or other cinematic techniques as a function of the observing character's desire, unlike Betsy in *Taxi Driver*. Conversely, none of the cinematic techniques involved would seem to condemn Seong-chul either. This is not to be confused with a tacit condoning, simply that Jeon Kyu-hwan's camera remains completely neutral throughout. There are a few instances in which Seong-chul's point of view is literally displayed on camera; however the same neutral attitude is maintained (though this is seemingly another inconsistency as, whether from his persistence to his crying and eventual suicide attempt, Seong-chul is clearly not a passive observer). This same camera appears in some of the more violent sequences of the films as well. Whether Seong-chul murder of his passenger in *Animal Town* or Il-hwan's beating of rival gang members with a brick, the camera shows conveys neither the character's rage nor any sense of moral outrage.¹⁸⁶ The camera is, essentially, without any sense of values or judgment. The irony, and the paradox, is that while the cinematic technique remains neutral, it is impossible for the film to truly be neutral in its selection of what is and what is not portrayed.

These three aspects - surveillance, voyeurism, and nihilism – combine to produce a camera which not only portrays the characters' alienation, but

¹⁸⁶ This is in distinct contrast to Travis's slaying of the petty thief or, even more starkly, the brothel shootout.

effectively denies their subjectivity vis-à-vis the viewer. In addition to the audience taking the perspective of the CCTV camera in Jung-lim's home, this effect is even more present in *Mozart Town*. The first scene in which Ji-won is on screen closes as she looks through her camera, and the audience is given Ji-won's perspective through the viewfinder – the shutter closes and Etoo is seen in the photograph, and this is used to transition to a scene of Etoo working in the Laundromat. This is the only such transition in the film (though the audience later observes Il-hwan through Ji-won's viewfinder), and it serves a function above and beyond Su-jin's observation of Jung-lim or Ji-won's casual photography – unlike these latter two cases, the transition from Ji-won's photograph to Etoo's place of work is a transition from Ji-won's subjective perspective to a perspective which she cannot possibly have. In this there is a breaking of the fourth wall which alerts the audience not only that they are watching a film, but that they are watching *tout court*. In other words, the audience is reminded of their role as active observer in the characters' lives, and therefore the subject.

This relationship is then turned against the audience in the end of the film. Il-hwan has been murdered; Ji-won is leaving to rejoin her husband; and Etoo is fleeing with his wife – to the extent that there are character arcs in *Mozart Town*, they would appear to have come to an end. The film continues, however, to a final scene of the hostess, left at the salon and unable to grieve for Il-hwan effectively. Extremely intoxicated, she vomits in the restroom before returning her patrons' room, where she proceeds to urinate pitifully on the floor. While two other women are horrified at the occurrence, the final frame of the film shows a male patron stooped over in the sofa, his intoxicated apathy gradually turning into a smile. In essence, this is the precise role which the audience has had throughout the film. The emotion is not quite *Schadenfreude*, but a sort of amused captivation by the object; the audience does not 'enjoy,' in the conventional sense of the term, the continued suffering of the characters' on camera, but nonetheless takes visual pleasure from the action on-screen, whether in the form of an emotional catharsis or a tension-release cycle.

3.2.2 Sexuality: Anxiety and Dysfunction

Jeon Kyu-hwan's films ultimately demonstrate sexuality in two forms; the first is as a representation of the character's alienation and inability to communicate, the other is in itself an act of (ineffective) rebellion against such alienation. As Kang So-hee states, "for Jeon Kyu-hwan impulsive and dissatisfying sex is a predominant cinematic mechanism for representing a city-life in which human relationships are impossible."¹⁸⁷ There is in fact little sexuality in Jeon Kyu-hwan's films, especially the Town Series, which is not either dissatisfactory or violent.

There is an instance in the Town Series of violence as a manifestation of sexual frustration, namely the case of Seong-chul. Though we have previously discussed the economic alienation surrounding Seong-chul's murder of his passenger, there is a sexual component as well. After killing the woman, he drags her body out of the car he inadvertently removes her pants, suggesting a sexualized violence even though, for Seong-chul, the adult woman is not an object of sexual appeal. This, ironically, underscores the sexual component of his murder. Seong-chul makes clear efforts to engage with adult women, including a prostitute in the beginning of the film; he is, however, unable due to his impotence. It is unclear whether his impotence is caused by a failure to find attraction to adult women or his medication (presumably a sexual suppressant), or a combination of both. Seong-chul's sexual frustration is clearly twofold. He is unable to satisfy his paraphilic desires but is also incapable of desiring a normative sexuality. The accidental disrobing of his victim subsequently becomes symbolic of the sexual frustration underpinning his violence, a symbol further emphasized by his immediately taking his medicine after the murder.

The spatialization of alienation is perhaps best exemplified, however, in the relationship between Il-hwan and the hostess with whom he work. It is clear from their interaction that the two respect and care for each other; one day, Il-hwan returns particularly intoxicated, and the two start becoming intimate with

¹⁸⁷ 강소희, 145 (전규환 감독에게 돌발적이고, 불만족스러운 섹스는 인간관계 자체가 불가능한 도시의 삶을 형상하는 주된 영화적 장치로 활용[된다])

one another; rather than having sex, Il-hwan looks at her backside and begins to masturbate. Although Kim Yi-seok suggests that “as the woman does not seem to display any dissatisfaction, it is possible to intimate that the two are used to this kind of sex,”¹⁸⁸ the seemingly bewildered hostess’s facial expression would seem to suggest otherwise. As such, there does not seem to be any strong suggestion that the two had had any prior engagement. Moreover, given the apparently respectful and even affectionate relationship between the two, it would be counterintuitive that he engage with her in such a bizarre manner out of finding her ‘contaminated.’ Instead, it is very likely a means by which he hopes to differentiate himself from her clients. The irony is that the same means by which Il-hwan attempts to distinguish the sexuality they share from the alienated sexuality she normally experiences only serves to create another form of alienated sexuality. This too may have a spatial dimension as, taking place in the room salon, namely the setting in which her alienated sexuality takes place.

The objectified relationship is when, rather than the social relationships themselves, the material goods which form those relations dictate their importance. This particularity is the particularity of capitalist society which Marx referred to as the ‘fetishism of the product’. The contradictory fetishism becomes more serious in sexual relationship and sexual consciousness among human relationships. For example... there is a trend of regarding the commercialization of sex as natural... In Korea the phenomenon of the commercialization of sex has become far more prominent in recent times and particularly the sex industry has grown monstrous. This is a factor in the increase *anomie* of sexual mores.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ 김이석, 21(여자가 아무런 불만도 내비치지 않는 것으로 보아 두 사람은 이미 이런 방식의 섹스에 익숙해져 있다고 해석할 수 있을 것이다)

¹⁸⁹ 박은희, 94, 강조 인용자 (물상화된 관계란 사람들 사이의 사회 관계 그 자체보다는 그러한 관계를 형성하는 물질의 가치에 따라서 중요도가 달라지는 것을 말한다. 이러한 특성이 바로 마르크스가 자본주의 사회의 특성에 논의하였던 ‘상품의 물신성 (fetishism)’이다. 이러한 인간관계에서의 모순적인 물신성은 성관계, 성의식에 심화되어 나타난다. 예를 들어... 성의 상품화를 자연스럽게 받아들이는 경향 등이 그것이다... 한국에서도 성의 상품화 현상이 근래에 와서 급진전되었으며 특히 향락산업이 기형적으로 팽창하였다. 이는 성문화의 아노미 상태를 가중시키는 요인이 되고 있다)

Reverting to the frequently used counterargument of 'sex labor' does not offer a solution in this case, as such an argument is ultimately founded on capitalist principle. The essence is that in a capitalist system labor is inherently based on the exploitation of labor, which is in the hostess's case her sexuality. While Park Eun-hee offers other arguments concerning the commercialization of sexuality, such as the reinforcement of the patriarchal double standard in which women are predominantly valued for their beauty, these are not particularly useful here. What is particularly pertinent is that, much as the hostess's labor – that is to say her sexuality – is alienated from her, and, perhaps as a consequence, she is the least emotionally expressive character, unable even to cry upon hearing news of Il-hwan's death. Moreover, she is also the character with the least amount of agency; she is sexually exploited by a corrupt police officer (presumably one who takes sexual favors in exchange for 'looking the other way'), and even in trying to move onto other work she is reliant on the aid and good will of Il-hwan (who dies before any help comes to fruition). In this regard, the exploitation is threefold; her sexuality is alienated from her as labor under a capitalist system, this is compounded by the patriarchal system under which such exploitation is considered natural and, moreover, by state power. Of course, as vessels of power, these three forms of exploitation reinforce each other.

We have intentionally avoided including Ji-won's relationship with Duc-sang in this analysis as, in addition to lacking a spatial component, does not appear the product of her social context. Her emotional alienation is far more personal, in nature, revolving around her abandonment by her husband and her subsequent loneliness and pessimism. There is, however, the same sense of fatalism present in the other characters as well as the socially induced instances of alienation. Whether the suffocation of her work environment her deeply rooted loneliness, Ji-won attempts to break the cycle through sex. Naturally the most notable scene is of Ji-won and Duc-sang going to a motel; as Kim Yi-seok explains, "looking at the condom in her hand, perhaps is acknowledging that she is waiting with the hope of taking any action - specifically sex- to escape her

emotionally damaged, ghost-like state.”¹⁹⁰ Even outside of this, however, Ji-won seeks out anonymous sex online. It is quite unlikely that she is making any attempt at a deep connection as, not only are the two meeting for the first time, but Ji-won agrees despite her chatting partner’s previous statement that “I don’t care about how you live.”(님이 어떻게 사는지 아무도 관심 없어요).¹⁹¹ Ji-won also acquiesces rather quickly to Duc-sangs’ advances, yet when the two go to a motel (in which she actively requests a condom from the manager), she becomes depressed, cries, and walks out while Duc-sang showers. Kim Yi-seok interprets this as “because of the fear she feels at the disbelief in the hope of being able to change her life, and the loss of even this momentary happiness.”¹⁹²

Kim Yi-seok goes on to suggest that Ji-won’s anxious premonition is realized in the phone call to her husband. This is true, yet there is another piece of the narrative structure which suggests the inexorable nature of her situation. Ji-won is introduced a few minutes into the film, seen brushing her teeth outside her stall and then receiving a phone call. These two actions are also among the last actions Ji-won takes on screen (while in the introduction this is one continuous scene, the latter is separated, with five minutes between the sequences). This link is similar to the identical sequences of Jung-lim vomiting by the roadside. The significance of this technique is quite different, however; Kang So-hee suggests that in *Dance Town* these serve as bookends revealing that the subject of the film a portrayal of “how she came to feel nausea about this space called Seoul.”¹⁹³ This repetition would seem to serve a similar function in *Mozart Town*, though the content is quite different. The second call is from her husband,

¹⁹⁰ 김이석 (2012), 15(자신의 손에 들린 콘돔을 보면서 아마도 지원은 허깨비 같은 자기 상실의 상태에서 벗어나 어떤 행위 – 구체적으로는 섹스 –를 기다리고 있는 자신을 인식하게 되었을 것이다)

¹⁹¹ Her interlocutor is coincidentally Duc-sang, but despite the fact that Ji-won had mentioned both her passion for photography and her work environment, there is no indication that either make the connection.

¹⁹² 김이석 (2012) 15. (자신의 삶을 바꿀 수도 있을 것이라는 기대에 대한 불신과 이 찰나의 행복마저도 결국은 깨지고 말 것이라는 두려움을 느꼈기 때문[이다])

¹⁹³ 강소희, 144(왜 서울이라는 공간에 대해 구토를 느끼게 되었는가의 과정을 그려내는 영화[다])

and, while the exact subject of the phone call with her mother is not specified,¹⁹⁴ it is presumable from the content that it involves her husband. The strangeness of this is that Ji-won had been left by her husband three years prior and yet the conversation between her and her mother gives the impression of a much more recent separation. These ‘bookend’ scenes, her voiceover narration about her husband while traveling with Duc-sang, and her inability to engage with Duc-sang at the motel, all suggest that Ji-won’s story ‘arc’ is her immobility, both socially and ‘moving on’ from her husband’s abandonment three years prior. In this light her brief appearance at the airport becomes all the more clear – the only escape from her prison-like work environment is to her prison-like marriage.¹⁹⁵

Ji-won’s emotional alienation is notably contrasted with her socio-economic alienation, as well as with the alienation of the other characters. This distinction also plays itself out in the associated cinematic techniques. While driving with Duc-sang to a restaurant, Jeon Kyu-hwan breaks with the typically hyperrealist style of the film and Ji-won’s voiceover is heard mentioning both the weather and the thoughts of her husband. In addition to underscoring the inescapable presence of her husband in Ji-won’s thoughts, the voiceover gives a rare moment of subjectivity. (This is one of the rare instances of voiceover narration in any of the town series, or indeed of any subjective technique, whether narration, POV shots, background music, imposition of character’s subconscious on the mise-en-scene,¹⁹⁶ etc.). While this may seem to be a contradiction with the overall theme of inescapable alienation, this is not necessarily the case as subjectivity does not forcibly connote agency.¹⁹⁷ That

¹⁹⁴ Even the call at the end is unspecific; it can be deduced the caller is her husband only from her apparent distress and the mention that three years have passed

¹⁹⁵ Given the lightness of her baggage and the fact that the view has no knowledge of precisely why her husband called, even this ‘escape’ is likely only temporary. There is the temptation to shoehorn Ji-won’s alienation as a product of the system of marriage, especially in juxtaposition to the relationships present in *From Seoul to Varanasi*. (For instance, the economic necessity often leads to loveless marriages and, on a social level, often results in adultery). However, the argument is unconvincing, even without mention of close marriage of Jung-lim and her husband (ultimately torn apart by political forces but not by estrangement.).

¹⁹⁶ For example, as Hyung-do reminisces on his deceased wife, she appears faintly on camera, another of the rare instances of subjectivity in Jeon Kyu-hwan’s films.

¹⁹⁷ Although the subjective techniques do not necessarily imply agency, Jeon Kyu-hwan does use objective (objectifying) cinematic techniques as a representation of the lack of or denial of agency, as we shall see in the next section.

which is salient, however, is the individualized and subjective nature of the cinematic presentation of Ji-won's interpersonal alienation, which suggests that Ji-won's feelings of abandonment have engendered an immobility analogous to her social immobility (manifested in the restrictive stall), but that they are not inherent in the social system. Nonetheless, Jeon Kyu-hwan does not present the possibility of any true alleviation or escape from her interpersonal alienation, in line with both her socioeconomic position and the alienation of the other characters.

3.3 Narrative, Alienation, and Immobility

3.3.1 Alienated Class as a Product of the Social System

As we have seen in the previous two sections, the individual phenomenon of alienation, and its subsequent projection onto the cityscape, is in many ways quite similar to that of *Taxi Driver*. Whether it is the lack of communication, oftentimes expressed sexually, or claustrophobia, the alienation as experienced by the characters quite often a self-alienation. However, *Taxi Driver* and the *Town* series offer a very different origin of this alienation; their alienation, while experienced individually is ultimately a product of the social system in which they live, and the subsequent consequences of this alienation is quite different.

Though economic, governmental, or social, the institutions were set up to facilitate self-realization have, over time, they have become perverted to the point of actually preventing this same realization and instead objectifying the human essence.¹⁹⁸ Where this ties in particularly to Jeon Kyu-hwan's films is the role of the social system in inducing a self-alienation through the former subject's objectification. The term 'objectification' is ironically fitting in the case of Jeon Kyu-hwan's films, as the characters are both 'objectified,' in the sense of their being under surveillance by the social subject (both the social system and, through the 'CCTV' camera technique, by the audience who inadvertently adopts

¹⁹⁸ See note 5

the gaze of that system), and by social system's elimination of their subjectivity, the self-alienation described by Kim Tyong-ho in the introduction. There two concepts are of course interrelated, as well as connected 'impossibility of intervention.' In the same way Nam Da-eun asserts that the realistic aesthetics of the films represent an impossibility of change or intervention,¹⁹⁹ Jeon Kyu-hwan's cinematic technique not only objectifies the characters but cinematically embodies their lack of subjectivity and objectification.

To delve deeper into the specific examples from the films, this objectification induced by the social system quite present in Il-hwan's case in *Mozart Town*. One of Jeon Kyu-hwan's most positive qualities is the ability to suggest a complex situation in a very short sequence; a talent which is imperative in a film with constantly revolving characters, each of whom is portrayed in a deliberately superficial manner. In the previous section, we had discussed the police abuse of the room salon attendant, yet this short sequence also has grave consequences for Il-hwan as well. The implication is that neither Il-hwan nor his establishment has the protection of the police (and by extension, the government). More than simple lack of protection, the same social system is ultimately the product of his demise. The illegality of his business prevents him from seeking legal recourse from either the exploitation of other criminals or enforcing the obligations of his debtors. Also, to simply cast Il-hwan off as a criminal, and subsequently hold him solely responsible for the consequences of his actions fails to address the role played by the social system in the proliferation of prostitution and shark loans, whether the commercialization of sex in the former case and the increasing income disparity and lack of access to credit in the latter. In both these cases Il-hwan is forced to use his own violent, physical force rather than the sanctioned force of the state, and the recipients of this violence are the same parties who killed him.²⁰⁰ Ultimately, as Kim Yi-seok points out, Il-hwan "though very physically power, he is a socially weak, isolated being who is

¹⁹⁹ See note 58.

²⁰⁰ Although it is never directly stated, Etoo was likely sent to kill Il-hwan by the owner of the Laundromat in which he worked; prior to his death, Il-hwan is seen threatening the owner to repay a loan.

ultimately stabbed and killed on the streets.”²⁰¹ The juxtaposition of these clauses is not accidental; despite his physical strength and apparent stoicism, without the protection of society or the state, he cannot help but suffer a miserable death. The much of direct aftermath of Il-hwan’s murder is not shown, but it is implied that there are very few consequences for the perpetrators.

This phenomenon may be better represented in some of the minor characters. In the previous section we have discussed the failure of the state in aiding Seong-chul - there is also a, perhaps even more pronounced, failure to care properly for the young girl; both from Seong-chul’s potential advances and in ensuring her proper education, care, and safety. Stated otherwise, the state has failed to ensure that she remains in the secure, socialized space of the school.

This alienation is far from being solely a political phenomenon, but also, an economic one. In order to develop upon this concept, it is first necessary to delve into the current status of capitalism in Korea and how it relates to Jeon Kyu-hwan’s films. As Kim Tyong-ho explains

...the labor class, having been converted into a profit class, has become equal members in today popular modern era.

Marx believed that as capitalism developed the rewards of labor would concentrate in the hands of a capitalist minority and the middle class would crumble and become a proletariat. In reality the opposite has come true. This is the division between possession and management; management has concentrated control in the hands of the few, but the advent of stocks has allowed capital to be dispersed among many petty capitalists.²⁰²

²⁰¹ 김이석 (2012), 17(육체적으로 그는 매우 강인한 존재지만 그는 사회적으로 고립된 약한 존재이며 결국 길거리에서 칼에 찔려 죽고 만다)

²⁰² 김종호 (1981), 112... (체제의 수익층으로 화한 노동자계급은 현대의 대중시대에 있어서는 동질적인 대중의 일원이 되었다.

마르크스는 자본주의 발전과정에서 생산주단이 소수의 자본자에 집중되는 동시에 중산층의 몰락, 프롤레타리아화가 생긴다고 하였는데 실제로는 그 반대의 현상이 나타났다. 즉 그것은

However, Kim Tyong-ho simultaneously disavows a principle of traditional Marxism while the same time introducing a similar social paradigm; one which is of particular importance in the analysis of Jeon Kyu-hwan's films. Specifically, Jeon Kyu-hwan films reflect a particular time in Korean economic history. While during Korea's rapid industrialization in the 1970's income inequality increased, however during later industrialization and the beginnings of deindustrialization occurred, income inequality greatly decreased. While it has begun to increase again as the economy shifts from the industrial sector to the service sector, the rapid growth has led to a significant middle class, which accounted for 75.4% in 1990 and, though smaller, still maintains a significant 67.5% in 2010.²⁰³ As Kim Tyong-ho correctly points out, the result of industrialization has not been the creation of a vast proletariat as Marx had initially predicted, but an expansive middle class of consumers – it is not a proletariat but a public (대중). However, the result of this is also a significant minority of chronically low income workers.²⁰⁴ This is the time period of the Town Series, and this minority is among its subject; this minority is just as alienated, yet both for lack of numbers and lack of organization, cannot carry out any meaningful revolution.²⁰⁵ This class distinction also contributes, in part, to the alienating effect of Jeon Kyu-hwan's camera, as the vast majority of the audience would likely be in this middle class category.

Perhaps the most pertinent example is again that of Seong-chul. As Kim Yi-Seok describes, “apartment complexes in the distance are a quite common background in reality, yet the city backdrop in Jeon Kyu-hwan's films are strangely

소유와 경영의 분리이며, 경영 내지 통제는 소수자의 수중에 집중되었지만 자본은 주식제도의 보급에 의해서 다수의 소자본가로 분산되었다)

²⁰³ Samy, 2

²⁰⁴ Though 김종호 correctly asserts that the alienation of the worker from his product in modern capitalist society has largely been alleviated by transforming the laboring class into a profiting class, the suggestion that this is demonstrated by shareholding is unconvincing. Rather, the alienation of the product from the laborer is assuaged by consumption and leisure. The proletariat's revolution, as with most revolutionary impulse in history, is abated by bread and circus.

²⁰⁵ And I would argue this alienation is very different from the chaotic modernity portrayed in earlier films such as <철수와 만수> (1988) or <그들도 우리처럼> (1990).

unfamiliar... The gap between the city and the characters represent characters' inability to integrate into the city."²⁰⁶ There is another crucial aspect; Seong-chul is used for the construction of this city, yet both the alienating effect of the camera angle and the juxtaposition of his construction work and the run-down, powerless and waterless apartment in which he lives demonstrate that it is a society in which he can never truly take part. Compounding this, in the opening scene, Seong-chul takes an elevator at the construction site and, seeming longing for the building is separated by the chain links.



3.3.2 Irresolvable Alienation

As we have seen, the Town Series takes place in contemporary Seoul under a de-industrializing economy, and globalized capitalism²⁰⁷; and the same alienation produced by such a system as predicted by Marxist philosophers, whether that alienation been fiscal, racial, or sexual. However the other key

²⁰⁶ 김이석 (2011), 122. (멀리 내다보이는 아파트 단지의 모습은 현실에서는 매우 익숙한 풍경이지만, 전규환의 영화 속에 재현된 도시의 풍경은 어쩐지 낯설기만 하다... 그리고 이 도시와 등장인물 사이에 존재하는 간극은 그 인물들이 자신이 바라보고 있는 그 도시에 소속되어 있지 않음을 의미하고 있기도 하다)

²⁰⁷ This is not to say a de-industrializing globalism – the mechanisms of globalism have led to industrialization in the global south along with a de-industrialization in many European, North American and, to a lesser extent, Northeast Asian countries. In a sense, globalism has shifted class division from an 'intra-national' phenomenon to an international phenomenon, where there are now highly financialized 'capitalist' (in the Marxist sense of the term) countries and proletariat countries. This division is not absolute, as certain sectors, most notably the service industry, are immune to outsourcing – this results in the same 'superfluous bodies' as mentioned in our discussion of *Animal Town* above.

component is its reliance on a Hegelian dialectical system in which the proletariat eventually overthrows the capitalist system. However, this dialectic, and the overall possibility for change, is not clearly presented in the film. Instead, each film is a 'slice of time,' whose dialectic progression (or rather if progression exists) is indeterminate. Many of the characters in Jeon Kyu-hwan's films do, in a sense, revolt out of alienation, whether sexually or violently (or both), but there is no organization and furthermore there is no indication of efficacy; it is not a rebellion but a self-destructive catharsis. There is possibly the potential for change, as the audience may be inspired by to action through, but this can only take place outside of the theatre – in the slice of time that any film in the Town Series takes place, there is no hope

Nam Da-eun and Kang So-hee take the rather pessimistic position that Jeon Kyu-hwan's films reflect the cinematic manifestation of the belief that all intervention is impossible. This would elude further to the idea that alienation is unavoidable, yet it also suggests that change is impossible on a social level outside of the theater as well – unable to change the matter themselves and unable to be reached from the outside, the alienation is absolute. Such a pessimistic stance is not necessarily warranted. The synchronization of the surveilling camera and the audience is not a statement of the inability to enter into their lives and do anything other than simply observe but rather as a mechanism for reminding the audience that they are indeed an observer. It is perhaps here that Jeon Kyu-hwan's camera becomes the most damning; it is a condemnation of the viewership who only watches, using the fictional characters' turmoil as a means of emotional catharsis or visual pleasure rather than attempt to ameliorate the lives of the real people that the characters represent.

It is perhaps because of these phenomena that the systematic alienation of racial and sexual minorities is far more easily overcome. Ethnic minorities, ultimately, do not prove a threat to the social system, and where de-industrialization and global capitalism have produced a domestic surplus of laboring bodies, maximized reproduction is no longer a facet of maximized productivity. It is perhaps for this reason which low-wage laborers such as Seong-chul and Etoo are so vulnerable to exploitation by their employers and in particular why they are not offered the necessarily protection of the state.

Another interesting case of the inescapable nature of alienation is that of Jung Lim. Oh Young-sook ties her alienation – specifically her rape at the hand of a police officer (who, as Sung Kyung Suk emphasizes, doubles as a citizen) – is inseparable from capital flows. She states “as the refugee in the film is violent thrust here and there along capital flows, they become aware before us, or perhaps more acutely, that there is nothing outside the realm of capital.”²⁰⁸ Sung Kyung Suk makes the obvious but too often under emphasized point that Jung Lim’s transition was not voluntary,²⁰⁹ a fact which further exacerbates her sense of deracinement. While her move to South Korea may have been a necessity spawning from politics, after her arrival she is subject to financial forces. This is underscored by the conversation two policemen have after stopping Jung Lim and asking for identification; the two, one of whom would eventually become her rapist, compare North Korean refugees to immigrants from South Asia or the Philippines, suggesting that she uses higher wages to send money back to her family. Despite the fact that the two are incorrect in Jung Lim’s case, it is nonetheless significant that the police/citizens assume financial motivation. After being violated by the police officer, Jung Lim soon learns of her husband’s execution. In his death, Jung Lim is finally and irrevocably separated from her homeland, and her rape reinforces her social vulnerability and perpetuates her new home as a consistently hostile one. Despairing, she attempts suicide. She is, however, unsuccessful and awakes in the hospital, accompanied by Su Jin. This is perhaps an ironic moment, as the woman tasked with surveilling Jung Lim, remains by her side at the hospital bed. Su Jin’s sincerity is unclear; if she visiting in the capacity of an authority figure, than Jung Lim’s persistent alienation is ready present. Even if Su Jin is sincere in her concern, the final sequence of the film is unequivocally hopeless. Under surveillance herself, Jung Lim watches a young schoolgirl; this girl becomes pregnant but aborts the child with pills, injuring her own health in the process. The final sequence shows in tall grass, where she commits suicide. She falls and is no longer visible to the audience. The camera

²⁰⁸ 오영숙, 205. She refers here both to *Dance Town* and *The Journals of Musan*. (영화 속의 탈북자는 자본의 흐름에 따라 아시아의 이곳저곳을 폭력적으로 떠밀려 다니면서 자본의 바깥은 없다는 사실을 우리보다 앞서, 혹은 보다 절실하게 체험적으로 깨달은 자들일 뿐이다)

²⁰⁹ Sung, 376

then pans out, revealing that she was hiding on an island dividing a highway and, as the camera zooms out further, the cityscape is shown in the background. The implication is that zoomed out – that is to say to a social level – the young girl's death is not only inconsequential, but unnoticeable. This removes any sense of hope not only for the schoolgirl, but, as a foil, from Jung Lim as well. While there is still a small possibility of sincerity from Su Jin, Jung Lim's alienation appears inescapable.

However, much as the problem of alienation presented in Jeon Kyu-hwan's films can be attributed to a Marxist construction of alienation, there is also the possibility of a new, more developed, paradigm. Kim Ji-mi would seem to suggest this is the case; in her description of *Animal Town* as she states:

Evicting the weak who need to be protected in the name of 'renovation,' ordinary residential neighborhoods become slums; children become abandoned by welfare policy which finish at the desk; near non-existent safety mechanisms to break the link between harmful desire and crime; this is the true state of society.²¹⁰

Although this would appear to claim the opposite, describing outcast state of alienation of the numerous characters in *Animal Town*, Kim Ji-mi ultimately faults public consciousness and more importantly public policy. The subsequent solution is an expansion of the welfare system. Concretely applied to Jeon Kyu-hwan's films, it would necessitate a police that actively protects immigrants from exploitation instead of perfunctory checks; social services which coordinate with schools to ensure the proper welfare of children; and a mental healthcare system which provides adequate care instead of being a mechanism of surveillance and control. However, though the necessity of these reforms in

²¹⁰ 김지미, 420-1. (보호받아야 할 약자들을 '재개발'이라는 허울로 몰아내어 멸절한 거주지를 슬럼화하고, 책상머리에서 이루어지는 복지정책으로 아이들은 유기되어, 불순한 욕망이 범죄로 연결되는 것을 막아줄 수 있는 안전정치가 거의 존재하지 않는 이 사회의 실상) If the '안전정치' to which Kim Ji-mi refers is indeed intended to help Seong-chul cope with his desires, rather than simply ensure he does not harm anyone, then her conclusion is not at all dissimilar to our analysis of the scene of Seong-chul speaking with his doctor.

ameliorating to condition of the alienated class may be seen as implicit in Jeon Kyu-hwan's films, they also demonstrate that, if the social system remains in its current state – that is to say the slice of time portrayed in each of the Town Series - then there is no true chance for them to transcend their alienated status. In essence, while perhaps future society has the opportunity to change and evolve, the alienated class of Jeon Kyu-hwan's films is inescapably, and invariably, alienated.

Chapter 4. Conclusion

Alienation represents one of the central themes of both *Taxi Driver* and Jeon Kyu-hwan's Town Series. This sense of alienation is communicated not only through the plot and characters, but reflected in the mise-en-scene itself, often projecting the characters' sense of alienation spatially. Taking place in some of the world's largest cities, New York and Seoul, the filmmakers utilize open cityscape and urban microcosms to communicate isolation and alienation. The key difference is precisely the manner in how these spaces interact with each other and with the characters; and these differences lead the audience to a completely different outlook on alienation. Precisely how this alienation is portrayed is dependent of the philosophical outlook of the filmmaker. This philosophical underpinning also dictates the characters' ability or inability to overcome their alienation. *Taxi Driver* was written by Paul Schrader, impassioned by existentialist philosophy and Protestant theology. Protagonist Travis Bickle's alienation is inextricable from his social isolation, and is ultimately an individual, subjective alienation. Whether or not Travis is able to resolve his alienation is quite ambiguous; it is, however, clear that Travis lives in a world in which alienation is not only individually experienced, but in which the individual is responsible for and capable of facing their alienation. Jeon Kyu-hwan's films, on the other hand, espouse of a view of alienation as a social phenomenon. Alienation, while experienced by the individual, is inherent in the social system. This alienation results in a limitation of the characters' agency; lacking agency, the characters are in turn incapable of overcoming their alienation. Although there is the implication that if society were to be changed this alienation may be resolvable, within the context of the film the alienate class remains invariably alienated. There is an additional layer of pessimism as Jeon Kyu-hwan seems to accuse the audience of being passively complicit in continuation of the social structure.

From the cityscape to the private homes and workplaces of the characters' these philosophical differences have a profound effect on the portrayal of space throughout the film. One prime example is through the character's primary living space. In *Taxi Driver*, Travis's room represents his sense of (self-imposed) isolation, a physical manifestation of his mental state. It is a

prison which he has forced himself into, and the miscellanea strewn about his room reflect a disorganized, chaotic mental state. In the Town Series, space equally becomes a prison, but it is one which is socially imposed; mobility is teasingly suggested, yet ultimately denied, as is the case with Ji-won's stall. Despite the open entranceway to her side and the large window in front of her, Ji-won is incapable of doing little more than move her feet and take photographs of a broader society with which she cannot interact. Much like Travis, her space reflects her mindset – organized yet claustrophobic.

Sexuality plays a central role in to alienation throughout the films. For Travis it is highly personalized and, whether a manifestation of or the cause of his alienation, it is ultimately individual, and a conflict not present in the other characters of the film. Moreover, Travis's sexual compulsions exemplify both his contradictory behavior and his black and white mentality. As a result, *Taxi Driver* presents pornographic space from which Travis cannot escape (or rather, to which he compulsively returns), whether the literal space of the pornographic theater or the night streets populated by prostitutes and criminals. The spatial element of sexuality is far less pronounced in Jeon Kyu-hwan's films; however sexuality represents a key component of the characters' alienation. Dissatisfactory sexual relationships are endemic in films, affecting almost every character. These relationships are symbolic for a deeper inability to communicate, exacerbating their alienation. In many cases, this dissatisfied sexuality has an intimate connection with the social structure, whether the exploitation of the hostess in *Mozart Town*, Jung Lim's rape at the hands of a police officer in *Dance Town*, and possibly even Seong-chul's sexual pathology.

This difference also manifests itself in the cinematic techniques – *Taxi Driver* is replete with POV shots, and exclusively follows Travis's perspective. The subjectivity is so absolute that the audience is not even given an alternative to his world and the only exception occurs late in the film only to underscore Travis's absolutism – though this scene has the intention of making Travis less sympathetic, it also emphasizes Travis's agency in determining and acting on his values. Moreover, in addition to the mise-en-scene, the lighting, colors and even speed match Travis's subjective perception and mood. Jeon Kyu-hwan's technique is precisely the opposite; there are almost no POV shots, and the handheld

camera and long takes often gives a documentary-like quality to the film. The audience is subsequently incapable of entering into the thoughts and feelings of the characters. Although there is a heightened sense of objectivity and truth to the events fold, this cinematic technique is another form of alienation, specifically between the audience and the characters on screen. The use of this divide is twofold; where the audience does take a character's perspective – usually that of a surveilling figure of authority – the effect is far more pronounced and the audience becomes aware of their role of observer. This is closely related to the second use; the camera becomes a means of further denying the subjectivity of the onscreen characters while also serving as a manifestation of their broader social alienation.

Cinematic technique, plot, and narrative structure combine to draw radically different conclusion on alienation. *Taxi Driver's* highly subjective, existentialist interpretation lends itself to an alienation which can be transcended or at least managed. Being a product of the person's subjectivity, alienation is their responsibility of the individual; yet this responsibility also implies that transcendence is possible. In Jeon Kyu-hwan's films, the alienation is pervasive and more or less affects all of the characters, suggesting that this alienation is a product of and reinforced by the social system itself. The means by which the characters' are alienated are also social mechanisms, whether through class or the treatment of ethnic minorities or ex-convicts. The characters are denied subjectivity by the camera and agency by their environment. Lacking agency, the characters have no means by which to escape or resolve their alienation, and the result is quite often resulting in an outburst of violence or suicide. The irony is that this violence is often perceived as a legitimization of oppressive social environment – the constant surveillance and alienation leads to violence, and the violence proves the need for surveillance and sequestration. In identifying these mechanisms, it is possible that the system may be ameliorated and the vicious cycle ended; it would seem that this is the utility of the films in the Town Series. This purpose, however, exists only on the level of the audience; within the action of the film, the characters are invariably and inexorably alienated.

More than simply being a cinematic flourish or an abstract debate between Marxism and Existentialism, the ability or inability to overcome

alienation leads inexorably to a discussion of the nature of the individual and of agency. This discussion is intertwined with a variety of fields, perhaps most notably social and developmental psychology. Also, to the extent that alienation is a social phenomenon, the role and responsibility of the citizen also becomes the subject of political consideration. With the Town Series, the efficacy of the film's message is subsequent determined by its perceived verisimilitude. If the audience's belief that a cinematic portrayal is real dictates their reaction and motivation to action, it would be valuable for future research to delve into the comparative effectiveness of similarly themed fiction and documentary film. Conversely, where alienation is centered on the individual, the viewer can be moved to better understand their situation and subsequently be better equipped to ameliorate it, even if it is, as in the case of *Taxi Driver*, a cautionary tale. Though addressing alienation on different levels, it is our conviction that there is not only a valuable cinematic study to be found in the comparison of *Taxi Driver* and the Town Series, but also a real-world utility in their juxtaposition.

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초록

영화와 소외의 공간화

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본 연구는 스콜세지 감독의 <택시 드라이버>와 전규환 감독의 타운 시리즈 속에 공간 사용을 비교하고자 한다. 특히 공간 사용의 공통점과 차이점을 탐구하면서 등장인물들의 소외는 어떻게 공간에 투영되어 있는지를 살펴보고자 한다. 다른 시기와 다른 국가에서 활동했음에도 불구하고 유사한 촬영 기법을 사용한다는 사실이 기법과 철학적 개념의 연관성을 탐구하기에 유익할 것이다. <택시 드라이버>를 해석할 때 감독의 다른 작품에 비해서 각본 작가인 폴 슈레이더에 집중한다. 스콜세지 감독과의 협작이 많으며 소외는 슈레이더의 다른 각본과 감독으로 촬영한 영화에서 주된 테마 중에 하다가 때문이다. 본 연구는 각 영화의 영화사와 장르적 배경을 소개하기도 한다.

<택시 드라이버>는 오로지 주인공인 트레비스 비클의 입장에서부터 촬영한 작품이다. 트레비스가 부재한 씬이 하나도 없으며 직접서술(voiceover)와 POV 샷을 통해서 트레비스의 심리적 고뇌를 관객에게 직접 전달한다. 그리고 공간과 누벨 바그의 촬영 기법을 통해 미장센도 트레비스의 고독과 내적 혼란을 투영하게 된다. 카메라는 좁은 택시와 작은 아파트에 막힌 트레비스를 따라간다. 처음에 트레비스는 단순한 외로움과 불면증에 시달리는 것 같지만 영화가 진행될수록 실존적인 위기에 대면하고 있는 게 명확해진다. 타인으로부터 정서적으로 단절되었고 더러운 뉴욕의 풍경에 대하여 구토를 느끼는데도 충동적으로 슬럼을 찾아간다. 트레비스의

성의식도 그의 여러 모순을 심화시킨다. 엄격한 금욕주의와 극보수적 가치관을 갖고 있으면서도 성인극장을 다니고 무의식적으로 성매매여성에게 근무하는 타임스퀘어 길거리를 관찰한다. 트레비스를 위해 이런 공간들이 ‘포르노그래피적 공간’돼버린다. 그는 소외감을 느낄 때마다 이러한 모순적인 사고방식 때문일 것이다.

이 모순들이 트레비스의 이분법적 흑백 윤리에서 비롯된 것이다. 그는 모든 사람을 좋은 ‘사람’과 악한 ‘쓰레기’로 나눈다. 그러나 트레비스는 이 이분법적인 가치관에 따라 살지 못한다. 때문에 그의 혼란을 달래기 위해 대선 운동 직원의 사랑을 추구한다. 하지만 데이트로 성인 영화에 같이 보러 간 후에 그 여성이 관계를 끊는다. 트레비스는 자신도 모르게 이 ‘청순한’ 여성도 더러운 유혹을 느끼는지를 알아보고자 하는 실험이었다. 관계가 끝난 후에 그의 집착은 청소년 성매매여성에게 돌리게 된다. 그녀를 구조함으로써 청순한 여성으로 구원하고 싶다. 이 과정은 그녀의 알선과 폭력적인 갈등에 이루어지는데 트레비스의 폭력적 폭발은 자살 시도 되기도 한다.

영화 속에 소외의 묘사하는 방법, 적응한 동료, 그리고 슈퍼히어로의 인터뷰와 평론 활동을 고려하여 트레비스의 세계에서는 소외는 해결이 없는 게 아니라는 사실이 명확해진다. 슈퍼히어로의 영화적 롤모델인 로베르 브르송의 영화의 등장인물처럼 소외를 초월하지 못하더라도 견딜 수 있을 정도로 소외를 달랠 수 있는 것이다. <택시 드라이버>의 결말은 의도적으로 모순적이고 애매한데 초월을 이루었는지, 아니면 그의 폭력적 폭발은 반복될 카타르시스일 뿐이었는지의 질문에 정확한 대답이 없다. 그리고 트레비스에 갈등들을 해석하기에 사르트르나 도스토예프스키 같은 <택시 드라이버>의 실존주의적 근원을 탐구할 필요가 있다.

전규환 감독의 영화 작품들이 거의 정반대의 기법으로 촬영되었다. 전규환은 ‘하이퍼사실주의’적 기법을 이용하며 그의 영화들이 마치 다큐멘터리처럼 보인다. 타운 시리즈에서는 모두 표현주의적인 기술이 완전히 최소화시켰으며 전규환 감독은 (썸의 액션이 끝났는데도) 롱 테이크와 최소화된 연기를 선호한다. 내레이션이나 배경음악이 없고, 주된 줄거리 없으며 있는 줄거리는 간단하고 일상적이다. 한 인물을 따르기보다 타운

시리즈의 영화들이 여러 줄거리로 나뉘어 있다. 특히 <모차르트 타운>에서 주인공이 없다고 말해도 과언이 아닐 것이다.

남편한테서 버림을 당한 가판대 직원, 아동 성범죄 전과자, 탈북 여성 등 등장인물이 많고 다양한데도 공통점이 하나 있다. 경제적 차별이든 민족 차별이든 모두 다 사회로부터 소외된 인물들이다. 전규환 감독은 사실주의적 태도를 갖고 있지만 카메라를 통해 표현주의적인 효과를 미칠 수도 있다. 끝이 없어 보이는 도시 풍경, 답답하고 감옥 같은 인물의 개인 공간 등 카메라의 위치를 통해 도시를 변화시키고 흡인력이 있게 인물들의 소외감을 강화시킨다.

타운 시리즈에서는 성관계도 소통의 불가능성을 묘사하기에 중요한 역할을 갖고 있다. 불만스럽고 때로 충동적인 성관계는 사회에서 버림받은 것과 인간관계의 불가능성을 표현하는데 인물들의 상실한 주체성을 강조하기도 한다. 또는 타운 시리즈의 인물이 사회로부터 소외된 것과 마찬가지로 카메라도 인물을 관객으로부터 소외시키고 그들의 주체성을 방해한다. 이 요소들이 절망스럽고 불가피한 소외감을 그려낸다. <택시 드라이버>와 정반대로 소외는 개인의 태도나 사고방식에 - 즉 개인의 주체성 - 걸려 있는 게 아니라 사회체계에서 비롯된 것이다. 따라서 개인이 자기 삶을 개선하지도 못하며 이 위기는 비극적인 폭력에 이루어지게 마련이다.

주요어: 폴 슈레이더, 전규환, 소외, 공간, 실존주의

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